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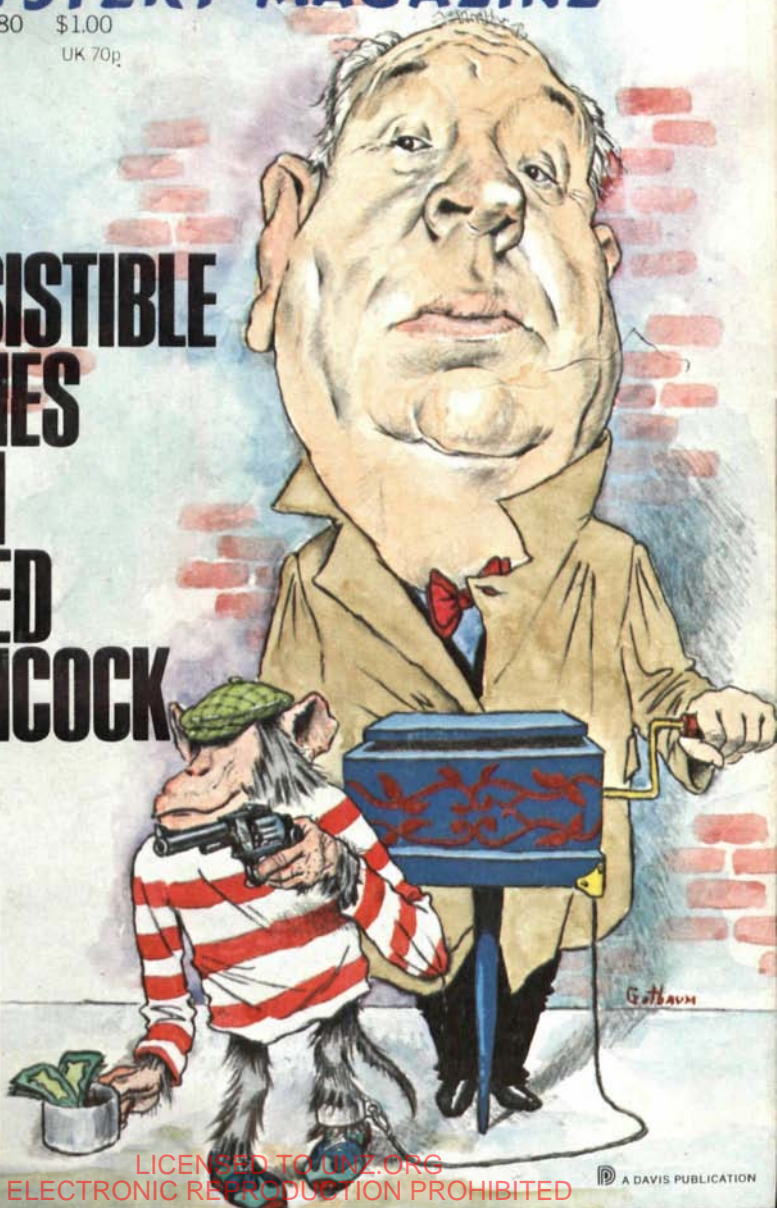
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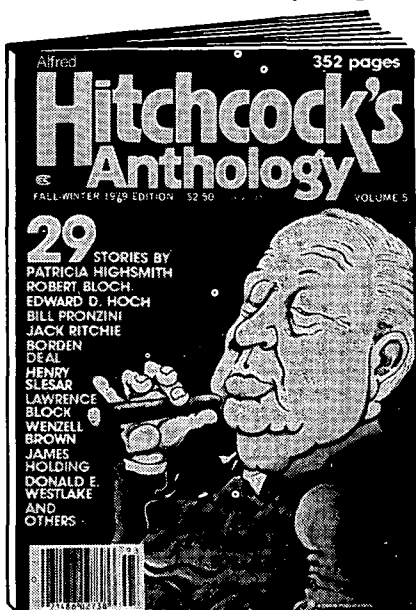
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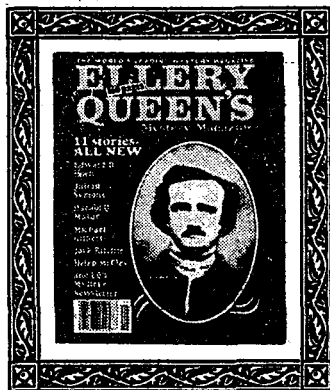
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VOLUME 24, NO. 13

JANUARY 2, 1980

ALFRED

# HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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January 2, 1980



Dear Reader:

This month's issue explores many timely themes — for example, the modern-day phenomenon of fandom in "Big Bang" by Ron Goulart, and the psychological horror of killing at random in John Freeland's "On the Edge."

"Time," said the poet Swinburne, "turns our loves into corpses or wives." Donald Olson might have had this in mind when he wrote "The Last Time." Edward Wellen's "The Time and the Place" will give you an unusual perspective on both. Private investigator Sam Train takes on an "Assignment in Geneva" in the story by Ernest Savage, but the jet lag he experiences is nothing compared to the feelings of the time-traveler in Barry N. Malzberg's "Running Around."

Some people consider TV-watching a waste of time, but they could never convince Miel Tanburn's "Faithful Viewer." For a change in tempo, find out what happens when Chick Kelly opens a discotheque in S. S. Rafferty's story. I'm sure you'll find the time to read every one of the ten fine stories in this issue.

Good reading.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

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*Sam Train goes to Geneva to track down a murderer . . .*

# ASSIGNMENT IN GENEVA



They lived in an old house in an expensive neighborhood with an old and still unblocked view of the Bay that was painfully nostalgic. The mother, Mrs. McCawley, met me at the door. Through a three-inch crack she studied my face closely and read my card twice before letting me in. I'd phoned twenty minutes earlier and advised them I was on my way, but in this town it could have been a trap, couldn't it?

Her eyes were red-rimmed but I didn't know why. I knew only that

ASSIGNMENT IN GENEVA

her son had asked my answering service to have me call.

She led me to a parlor and sat me down with my back to that million-dollar view. Her son was already there, dressed in a robe, pajamas, and slippers, and seated in a chair opposite mine. In the clear painter's light from the huge north-facing window behind me, he looked ill. He appeared to be thirty-five to forty. His mother introduced us. His name was Bennett McCawley. She didn't have to tell him that mine was Sam Train.

"We're not sure what it is I've got," he said forthrightly, "but we are sure it's not catching."

"Otherwise," his mother said, "I'd have had it by now." She sat in a chair next to his and they traded swift glances. She looked unkempt and tired; fifty-five to sixty, I would guess. I waited for more, but none came. They seemed shy and depressed.

"Who starts?" I said, smiling. "Who tells me why I'm here?"

They both did, taking turns, sometimes disagreeing, sometimes correcting one another—as all people do who've lived together for a long time; as do any two witnesses to the same crime.

"We are—" she said—"that is, I should say, the family business is McCawley Press, Incorporated—but I'm quite sure you've not heard of it unless you're—"

"—of a scientific bent," her son finished.

"I'm not," I said. "Science scares me."

"As well it should," he said. He had nice lively eyes when talking. The McCawley Press, he told me, had been established by his grandfather in 1906, just after the quake. From the beginning it specialized in scientific publications—textbooks, monographs, and seminar programs. These products, printed only in English, were distributed world-wide, on both sides of the Iron Curtain—in fact, everywhere. Their printing plant and headquarters was downtown on Seventh Street. They had an overseas office in Geneva, Switzerland.

"It's not really an office," Mrs. McCawley amended. "It's just an apartment, but the—er—men have to go there often enough so that keeping an apartment is cheaper than hotel bills would be. It's where Charles was killed—murdered." She turned her head aside and I looked quickly at her son.

"Yes," he said. "Murdered. Shot with his own gun. Charles is my older brother—was. It happened five days ago, on Monday. Charles was thirty-eight." His eyes were less lively now.



"At least they think it was Monday," Mrs. McCawley said. "They didn't find him until Wednesday—just two days ago, Mr. Train—so they can't be sure. Or so they say."

"They *can't*!" Bennett said with some heat. "Why do you quarrel with that? It could have been Sunday—or even Saturday." He looked at me. "Charles arrived in Geneva last Friday, a week ago today. He was to have attended a U.N.-sponsored seminar on nuclear-waste disposal on Monday, but he didn't. He was to have phoned me with a report Tuesday morning our time, and when he didn't I took action. We also publish a monthly scientific newsletter, Mr. Train. He was there as a reporter."

"What action did you take?"

"First, of course, I attempted to reach Charles by phone, and when that failed, I called a—an acquaintance in Geneva, who was unable to rouse him and, ah—she notified the police."

"By which time it was Wednesday morning."

"Yes."

"And they found—what?"

"Him dead—long dead, Mr. Train. Shot in the heart at close range by his own gun. He was seated at his desk in the apartment. He'd been typing something—I don't know what."

"A letter?" I suggested. "Maybe it was dated."

"Maybe. It's one of the things you can find out when you're there."

"You want *me* to go to Geneva?"

✓ "Yes. That's why we called you—why *I* called you. I hope you're free to. I mean, passport in order and so forth."

"It is," I said. "And I'm free to. But what good can I do? What do you expect me to do?"

"Represent us, I suppose." He shrugged, looking sallow and tired under the penetrating light. "Find out who did it." He smiled weakly. "I understand you're a competent man."

I didn't ask from whom he understood that. All my clients come to me through referrals—and some I'm not too proud of. Knowing could prejudice me.

"All right," I said. "So who would want him dead? Who would benefit?"

"No one."

"Neither of you?"

"What? No. How?"

"He wasn't married?"

"No."

"So who inherits his estate?"

They looked at each other as though the thought had never crossed their minds. He said, "Well, yes, I suppose we do." He frowned. "Or I do. I'm not sure how it reads. But that aside, Mr. Train, we were *here* at the time."

"Both of you?"

"Well, I was. Lana was with Edwin in New York."

"Who's Edwin?"

He explained. "We have another brother, Mr. Train—Edwin, Junior, the baby of the family. He's named after Father. He goes to Dartmouth. Lana visited him over the weekend. Right, Mumsy?"

It jarred her out of a bemused stare. "Yes," she said. "Edwin's in his senior year. He'll graduate in June."

"Maybe," Bennett said.

"He'll graduate in June." She said it in taut, firm italics and then stood up. "Would you like coffee, Mr. Train? I need something to do."

I told her I would and watched her rise and walk out of the room, an unprepossessing sight, the unevenly dyed red of her hair clashing almost in decibels with the expensive orchid-hued pantsuit she wore. I was sure she had not decorated the handsome, almost flawless room in which we sat.

I said to her son, "You've talked with the Geneva police?"

"Yes." He writhed in his chair as though his bones hurt. "An Inspector Gautier. Last night. He said they have no suspects, but the gun has a clear set of prints that they're checking. He seemed quite elated about that, but about nothing else."

"How did the killer get in?"

"Gautier doesn't know. The only thing he's sure of is that he didn't break in. The apartment's on the fifth floor, with a spring-lock front door. One would need a key."

"Why did your brother keep a gun, Mr. McCawley?"

"Ah! Well, it was Father's gun, actually. Father initiated the lease on the apartment—Lord!—nearly thirty years ago. You see, certain aspects of our business can be—er—risky. Espionage, Mr. Train. Industrial as well as political—in fact, mostly industrial. Sometimes the materials we gather are—coveted by others."

"You mean McCawley Press is engaged in espionage?"

"No, not in any deliberate way. But our newsletter is subscribed to by almost every government and industrial organization of any size in the world—and sometimes we're asked to withhold publication of certain—data." His voice dwindled away.

"Withhold, or else—is that what it amounts to?"

"That may be stating it a bit dramatically, but yes."

"Conversely, the withheld data would have a market value—possibly enormous."

"Yes."

"Does Inspector Gautier know about this aspect of the case, Mr. McCawley?"

"Oh, I'm sure he does. Geneva is a hotbed of espionage and always has been. There's one notorious café on the Quai du Mont Blanc through which information flows like beer. Everybody knows about it."

"Was Charles involved in this clandestine side of your work?"

"I don't know for sure. He was more drawn to it than I—I mean, it can be exciting but—" He paused and gathered his robe more snugly around his neck.

"But what?"

He glanced cautiously at the arch through which his mother had gone before speaking again. "Well, what worries me as much as anything, Mr. Train, is that *I* was supposed to be in Geneva this time, not Charles. We've alternated that duty for years and he had it last time. *I* would have been seated at that desk except for this—plaguey whatever-it-is I've got."

"So you think *you* were the intended victim?"

"I think it's possible. I really don't know what to think."

"Do you and he look enough alike that the killer could have confused you?"

"Yes, we do. Charles and I were often mistaken for one another."

He was tiring fast and I stopped the flow of questions forming in my mind. If I were to do him any good, it would likely be in Geneva, not here. I felt upbeat about the job, suddenly eager to board the plane and wing away. It had been years since I'd been in Geneva. But there were still things I would need to know from him. He lit a cigarette and it bucked him up.

I said, "Who is this woman you phoned in Geneva?"

He smiled wanly. "Marie Bentley. She's my fiancée, Mr. Train. Assuming I survive this current malaise, we're to be married four weeks

from Saturday. Marie's a translator for the U.N.—the romance languages. I met her in Geneva five years ago. But we'll live here, in this house." He sighed and then drew more smoke into his lungs.

"Another thing," I said. "How is McCawley Press divided among you? Or is it?"

"It is—but why do you ask? Do you seriously think I or Edwin or Lana killed him?"

"If one of you did, would you want me to find it out?"

"But *how* would one of us have done it, Mr. Train?"

"That's a naive question, Mr. McCawley. You could have hired someone to do it, for instance. And how long was your mother—Lana—gone last week?"

"She left Friday and came back Sunday."

"Leaving you alone here for the three critical days."

"Meaning what?"

"Well, let's assume you're faking this condition you've got. You popped over to Geneva, did your brother in, and popped back."

"You're kidding, of course."

"Or Lana did the same thing from New York."

"Mr. Train—it crosses my mind we may have enlisted the wrong man."

"That could be," I said, "but this is how a normal inquiry would go, Mr. McCawley. If your brother had been killed here, the police would be asking you these questions, not I."

"But he was killed there."

"There's not that much difference any more. Now tell me how the business is owned."

He sighed again and stubbed out his cigarette clumsily. He didn't have much strength left—assuming, I thought, caught up in my own fancy, he wasn't faking it.

"It's not complicated," he said. "I haven't thought of it for years, but the central provision is that no part of the business can be owned by an outsider. No *part* of it. If we all decide to sell, fine, but any *one* of us must sell to the others. Or when one of us dies, his share goes to the others—with, I would suppose, compensation to his heirs. I forget the details."

"But Charles had no heirs, right?"

"Right—unless he's named some friend or another. We haven't had the time to look into such matters. Nor the inclination, frankly. Almost

my first thought was to send someone to Geneva—you, as it turns out—to, er—

"Find out who killed him," I said. "The assumption being that you were the intended victim."

"Yes, I admit it. That's why I want you to go there. That's what I want you to do."

"Do you have any enemies, Mr. McCawley?"

"None I'm aware of—and I've given it a great deal of thought in the last two days, believe me."

"Did your brother have any?"

"Again—not that I'm aware of."

"Who's your doctor, Mr. McCawley?"

"Eh? Oh, yes—I get your point. Quentin R. Wallace."

"Have you seen him for this problem?"

"No, but I intend to. It's simply not going away by itself."

"How long have you had it?"

"A week now—entirely too long." He sighed wearily and closed his eyes. "I'll see him on Monday."

There were more questions I would have liked to ask him but I didn't, out of consideration for his obvious distress. But some twenty-four hours later in Geneva—after meeting with Gautier—the answers would have been useful. Who, for instance, had keys to the apartment? Where did Charles keep the gun, and who could be expected to know? Did Marie Bentley have a key? After five years of trysting in Geneva with Bennett, would she not? And did Edwin?

Inspector Gautier had no answers to these questions, and wasn't interested in finding them. He had his own theory of the killing and it had him charmed, almost obsessed.

He met me by arrangement at Cointrin Airport in Geneva at four-thirty Saturday afternoon. Bennett had phoned him my arrival time and had also written an authorization for me to represent him that Gautier, speaking excellent English, accepted without question.

He had picked me up in his personal Renault and driven directly to a café on the Quai Gustave Ador where it seemed obvious he was a frequent guest. We sat down at a sidewalk table facing the famed Jet d'Eau, shooting three hundred feet into the calm hazy air above the lake. It was after five, the hour of the apéritif, and I expected him to order a

Pernod or something equally chauvinistic—but instead he asked snapshishly for a sensible Scotch and soda. As did I. We were both tired and showing it.

He raised his glass.

"To Mardukian," he said. "To his speedy return."

Mardukian, Gautier had told me on the drive in from the airport, had murdered my "friend" McCawley. Armin Mardukian—Egyptian, Turk, Greek, Iraqi, changing passports as the seasons or his fortunes changed. A man of many countries but a citizen of none. Geneva magnetized the type. Talking of him, Gautier rubbed his hands. He had wanted him for years—and now he had him, or would when he next crossed the border. Cops in a number of places had wanted him for years.

"A swindler, a thief, a killer," Gautier said with satisfaction. He lit a brutal-looking Gauloise-Bleu cigarette. "And a spy," he added, blowing smoke just past my ear: "He and your friend have done business before. We know that. Mardukian was seen near McCawley's apartment. We know that. Mar—"

"When?"

"Last Sunday or Monday—the witness isn't sure, but either day will do. Mardukian has been trading in nuclear-waste-disposal data for the past six months and that's what McCawley was here for this time. Besides!" He raised a finger, his dark eyes glowing fanatically in the fading light of day.

"The prints on the gun," I suggested.

"No. Those are his, I am certain, but that will have to be confirmed later. No, M'sieur Train, your friend named him in a dramatic dying statement!"

"Named him?"

"To all practical purposes, yes. He was at his typewriter when shot, writing notes to himself for the symposium scheduled for Monday afternoon. The notes were numbered—one through seven, very orderly. Below the last line of item seven, inset about a third of the way from the left margin of the paper, completely out of harmony with the format of the sheet—I will show it to you later—were the letters 'm, a, r,' obviously the beginning of Mardukian's name. Moreover, M'sieur Train, the keys to three letters had been struck at once and were bunched together at the access to the platen of the machine—the letters 'e, r, d.' McCawley was attempting to complete Mardukian's name, but died before he



could—and his last wavering stab at the keys engaged three instead of one.” He shrugged “*Et, violà*, our killer! Agreed?”

I wouldn’t have dared not to. Mardukian was Gautier’s *bête noire*. All veteran cops have at least one—criminals they are obsessively determined to nab, with or without evidence. It crossed my mind that McCawley could have been as easily attempting to write “Marie,” but I drank Scotch evasively and said, “When did Mardukian leave town?”

“Tuesday morning. He flew to Athens. But he will be back; he always comes back. And then—” his dark eyes flamed again “—your friend will be avenged.”

I didn’t mention the prints on the gun again. Obviously the local police didn’t have a set of Mardukian’s and it seemed likely that Interpol didn’t either. Interpol, from Paris, would have reported by now.

Gautier drank and smoked and settled comfortably into his chair. My letter from Bennett to him had not mentioned—at my insistence—that I was a private investigator, or that I’d been a San Francisco cop for nineteen years. The police are more territorially sensitive than almost any other kind of animal, and I didn’t want that problem to deal with.

“Well,” Gautier said affably, business talk finished, “is this your first visit to Geneva?”

“No, my second. I was here about ten years ago.”

“You Americans,” he said without approval, “always on the move. Do you find us changed?”

“Yes.” I wanted to needle him a bit. “For the worse.”

“Ah—how true!” He pointed toward the lake. “Over there—at the *plage*—four minutes’ walk from here—I used to swim when I was a boy. Today that water would rot the skin off your feet. And the haze in the air through which our Jet d’Eau bravely thrusts its plume—smog, as I’m sure you recognize with your nose as well as your eyes. It is,” he finished glumly, “the sour smell of success, and I wish, oh, how I wish it would go away.”

Briefly, we were as one; but he was a working man at the end of his day and anxious to get home. He stubbed out his evil-smelling cigarette. “You—ah—have reservations, M’sieur Train?”

“Bennett McCawley gave me a key to the apartment. He suggested I stay there—unless you had some objection.”

His brows had shot up. “But of course not,” he said. “How practical.”

“We Americans,” I said, standing, “have got to watch ourselves these

days, Inspector. All the money's over here now. I know where the apartment is—Route de Malagnou. I'll take a cab."

"*Bonne chance*," he said ambiguously.

An agile and determined man could have scaled the ornate stone façade of McCawley's apartment building, but he could not have gotten through the double-latched windows without breaking glass. Gautier's theory was that McCawley had let his killer—Mardukian—in, that he'd needed no key. Whether that theory was right or wrong, it was obvious the killer had come and gone through the door. That would imply that the killer had a key or was known to McCawley—or both. Who had keys? My favorite unanswered question. I had Bennett's. He'd gone upstairs in his San Francisco house to get it while I waited uncommonly long, looking out his view window at Alcatraz Island, glad it no longer housed prisoners in such cruel sight of this shore. Did Lana have a key? She'd never come back from her trip to make coffee, caught up in grief, possibly, for her dead first-born. A distraught woman, in any case, her eyes almost wild as they raked me at her front door Friday afternoon. Did Edwin have a key? Marie? A cleaning woman? The police had had to make a key to let themselves in, Gautier said—having no good reason to break down the door.

The apartment was tidy, the bed made, food in the refrigerator, booze in the liquor chest. McCawley's desk was near the front windows of the high-ceilinged living room, his typewriter—a Bruenig portable—centered on it. The killer had stood two yards in front of the desk, Gautier said, and shot McCawley through the left ventricle of the heart. Then the killer had put the gun down on the desk and walked out. Mardukian? Would he, or anyone in his right mind, leave the murder weapon right there, covered with his prints? Then McCawley had done his jiggery-pokery with the letters 'm, a, r'—and Gautier's *bête noire* was out of its cage once again. I know how it is with a *bête noire*: I had a guy named Zanders once who'd committed every crime in San Francisco for eighteen months. Until he was dead. The only cure for a *bête noire* is death.

I turned on the desk lamp. It was dark outside, going-home traffic flowing heavily but silently on the street below. It was an old building, thick-walled and draped, repellent of sound. No one had heard the single shot the killer had fired, Gautier told me.

I sat down in McCawley's desk chair—his hot seat, as it turned out for

him. Bennett wanted me to determine who had stood six feet in front of my presently puzzled eyes and killed his brother five, or six, or seven days ago. I didn't think it was Mardukian, evil though he undoubtedly was. I didn't think the fingerprints on the gun would turn out to be his, despite Gautier's fervent desire. But I had no idea whose they might be. Marie's? 'M, a, r'—then a cluster of three possibilities, 'i' not among them. But how reliably had dying strength guided McCawley's hand?

There was a Geneva phonebook on the desk. I looked up Marie Bentley's number and found it. She lived at 36 Place du Berg-de-Four, which was in the old city, as I remembered—not too far away. I made a drink and then called her.

She answered on the second ring. "Oui?"

I said, "My name is Sam Train. Bennett McCawley has asked me—"

"I know who you are," she said. "I talked to Bennett this morning. Where are you, Mr. Train?" She had a lovely voice; she would be easy to listen to even through some long, translated harangue.

"At the McCawley apartment," I said. "Malagnou."

"You're going to stay there?"

"Yes."

She paused. Then: "Have you eaten?"

"No. I'm having a drink."

"I will be over," she said. "Twenty minutes."

I waited at the desk. The apartment was a rectangle, with a hall from the front door to the living room running along one side. Off the hall were the kitchen and bath. The bedroom was an alcove off the living room across which drapes were drawn. From the desk I could look straight down the hall to the heavy, polished wooden door. That was what Charles McCawley had done five or six or seven days before—sat here and watched that door open, watched someone known to him walk down the hall, pause possibly at a commode just inside the living room to take out the gun, advance to a point six feet away, and shoot him. It all could have happened in fifteen seconds. Or had he gotten up to answer a knock on the door, let a friend in, and then returned to his desk?

I waited, checking my watch.

She was twenty-five minutes, not twenty, and she knocked. I waited, thinking she might knock again *pro forma* and then let herself in. But she didn't. She knocked three times more before I went, leisurely, to the door and opened it. She had a grocery sack in the crook of her left

arm, a handbag looped over her right. She had on a lightweight coat and raindrops sparkled in her hair. In Geneva it rains often and without warning.

"You're big," she said. "You sounded big over the phone."

She came in and turned immediately right into the kitchen. She was at home; she knew where to put things, where things were kept. She took a package from her grocery sack and opened it on the counter. Four tournedos, wrapped in bacon. "I brought four," she said, "because you sounded big over the phone."

I could have listened to her talk for hours without responding, but I said, "You're not so damn small yourself, lady. What will you drink?"

She told me and I fixed it rapidly and then helped her out of her damp coat, hanging it on a tree in the hall, and then watching her from the door. She wasn't beautiful, I thought, but in twenty-four hours I knew I would think she was—or redefine beauty. Enlarge its meaning.

"Why did Bennett send you?" she said. She didn't turn around.

"He didn't tell you? He wants to know who killed his brother." What he really wants to know, I thought with sudden grim insight, is that *you* didn't, lady. Her hair hung halfway down her back, a flow of honey. I would want to know that too, if I were he. But she couldn't possibly confuse one brother for the other, could she? I shook my head; it was bizarre, such speculation. But she had it in her, she had the *force*. She basked in a field of the stuff.

"Mardukian," she said. "Inspector Gautier told me a man named Mardukian did it." She turned and faced me squarely, leaning against the counter at her back. "Did he?"

"That's Gautier's *idée fixe*."

She didn't smile at my clumsy pronunciation of the French phrase. "So he didn't?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Then who did, Samuel Train?"

"You—possibly. You have a key?"

"I do. But I didn't dislike him that much, Samuel Train."

"You did dislike him, though—"

"Yes. And Lana and Edwin too. I dislike them all so much that I'm not sure now that I love Bennett. It's possible that what I really love is Bennett's house. You've seen his house?"

"Yes. Some view."

"Some *everything*, Samuel Train."

"Don't call me that," I snapped. "Call me Sam."

"I'm sorry. I felt an immediate need to attack you—it was a form of attack."

"So is shooting a man with a gun."

Her large hazel eyes were fixed firmly on mine. She stood five feet eight or nine in flat-heeled shoes, not all that much shorter than I. She smiled. "But I would never shoot *you*, Samuel Train."

I laughed and the tension between us eased. "If you have a key," I said, "why didn't you lend it to Gautier?"

"I didn't particularly want him to know I had one."

"Where did Charles keep his gun, Marie?"

"In that ugly commode in the living room. Top-drawer, left side."

"Who told you that?"

"No one. I discovered it all by myself. Collectively, I've spent many, many days—and nights—in this apartment, Mr. Train. I know all its secrets."

"Then who killed him?"

"All its secrets save one."

"You disliked Charles," I said. "And his mother, and Edwin. Did they dislike you?"

"Oh, my," she said. "Yes—in varying degrees of intensity."

"Was Charles against your marriage?"

"That would follow, wouldn't it?"

"And his mother?"

"Lana, you mean?"

"There's a difference?"

"Lana's not his mother, Lana's his stepmother. You didn't know that?"

"No."

"Lana is Edwin's mother only—and welcome to him. Yes, she's against our marriage."

"What's the matter with Edwin?"

"Nothing, except that he's ruined—he's a ruined young man." She studied me, head cocked. "You don't know much about the McCawleys, do you?"

"Very little. What ruined Edwin?"

"Lana—and no one else. An obsessive mother's blind adoration—or does that sound too clinical? Anyway, he's been in trouble since he was

ten and she's always lovingly gotten him out. Bennett and Charles were discussing setting up a life trust for him—just paying him to stay away from the house and out of jail."

"A remittance man."

"I believe that's the expression."

She turned back to the counter and I went over and made us another pair of drinks. She was trimming the butt ends off asparagus when I brought hers back.

"I've been clumsy, haven't I?" she said. "And forward."

"Maybe a little."

"Bennett told me to be friendly toward you—to cooperate. I don't suppose he necessarily meant cooking you a meal, but he seemed awfully worried to me, Sam, about the murder. And he seemed ill—I wanted to know. Is he?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," she said. "He denied it, but his voice had no strength. What ails him?"

"As of yesterday afternoon he didn't know. He plans to see his doctor Monday."

She sighed, working. There would be a salad along with the asparagus; she'd brought tomatoes and a cucumber. And there would be hollandaise on the asparagus. I watched her from the side, approving her size, her looks, her presence. There were little laugh or cry or age lines fanning back from the corner of the eye I could see. Thirty-five years' accumulation, I would guess. No spring chicken, this big harmonious girl; time was running out for her. Would she kill someone who was against her marriage, who stood in its way? I would go to the ends of the earth to prove she hadn't—I felt as objective as a bowl of mush. She felt the heat of my attention and turned.

"I'm thirty-five years old," she said, and I smiled for reasons of my own. "I've had a marvelous time up until now—this is a very glamorous town, Sam—but I was born in San Francisco and I want to go home. I want children. I want them to be born where I was born, and I want to look out the windows of Bennett's house for the rest of my life."

"You're more sure of your love for the house than for him."

"That's true—but is it wrong, or bad? He changes, I change—from day to day. You change. The house is steady, a rock. He loves it too."

"He says you'll be married four weeks from today."



"Yes, we will. If—" She frowned at some dark inner shape.

"If what?"

"If he lives, Sam. Suddenly I have an awful feeling about that." She put a hand on my chest but withdrew it quickly; not to touch, we both knew that. "I want it to be Mardukian," she said softly, as though I could will it for her. "I hope it's Mardukian." She turned back to her work and I stared at my full glass a long time before lifting it to my lips.

I don't sleep well in other people's beds—the alien ghosts of an unknown past haunt me. I was up Sunday morning before seven, mean-eyed and clumsy, jet lag partly to blame too. But I was looking for excuses, any kind.

Inspector Gautier, entirely unexpected, knocked on my door at eight and I let him in. He carried a wet umbrella and looked as haggard as I. I knew the symptoms—his beast was raging again. He grumbled a sour good morning, walked directly to McCawley's desk, and stood there looking at it, eyes narrowed. "He would *not* have left the gun there," he said, confirming an opinion probably worked out through a sleepless night.

He walked across the room to the thermostat on the opposite wall. I had raised it just a while ago from zero to twenty degrees Celsius—about seventy Fahrenheit. I like a cold sleeping room. "I can understand him setting the thermostat as high as it would go," Gautier said, "but I cannot understand him leaving the gun on the desk, covered with prints. It wasn't Mardukian, M'sieur Train. We are back—in your colorful vernacular—to square one."

"Maybe not," I said. "This room was hot when you found him?"

"Stifling! At the highest setting. An obvious trick to hasten decomposition and confuse the time of death. *That* Mardukian would do, but the gun—no. He is not schizoid—he is not of two minds, but of one only, and very cunning too. The fingerprints belong to someone else, M'sieur Train. I should have seen it before."

"When does your pathologist think he died, Inspector?"

"Eh?" The question brought him further back on line. He was a cop again, not a blundering nemesis. "From the general condition of the body—Saturday. But discounting the excessive heat in this room, M'sieur Train, one must seriously consider Sunday, or even Monday."

His eyes, the scales having fallen from them, were seeing things they

hadn't seen before—the dishes on the table near the hall entry, for instance, where Marie and I had eaten last night. His glance danced over them and came to rest on me in uncensorious speculation. I had told her I'd wash them after she left. I had wanted her out of the place. There'd been too many ironies in the tableau last night, but despite them she'd become nearly pure music for me—a single unresolved chord. I'd wanted her to go almost desperately; we'd come too close. Gautier, adding the wrong numbers to a false total, shrugged and walked briskly to the door, ready to get about his trade.

It was 8:15 when he'd gone. I looked up a number at Cointrin Airport and dialed it. There was a 9:20 flight to New York I could catch if I hurried. I reserved a seat and promised to be there. Then I shaved and got dressed and dialed Marie's number—not to say goodbye, but to find out something only she could tell me. She answered sleepily and I gave her a moment to sort herself out. Then I said, "Did Charles speak French?"

"What? No. Why?"

"No French at all?"

"No. He had no ear for it. Why, Sam?"

"I'll let you know sometime," I said, and hung up gently and left the apartment, bag packed and in hand. Someone else would have to do the dishes.

I had thought I would lay over long enough in New York to fly up to Dartmouth and talk to Edwin, but by the time I got to Kennedy a certain panic had developed in my mind and I booked a seat on the first flight I could get to San Francisco. Waiting at Kennedy, I was tempted to phone Bennett, but didn't. If I was wrong about what I had in mind, I was very, very wrong. Besides, I suspected *she* would have answered.

My flight from New York almost paced the sun, the shadows on the wings of the plane and the ground below seemingly fixed, the day standing still, but Time itself ticking away. It was 6:30 P.M., still Sunday, when we touched down by the Bay. Only the watch on my wrist was not confused by it all.

I had taken the terminal bus from the city to the airport Friday night, but I took a cab back for the sake of speed—another fat item on the heavy expense tab I would lay on someone, or someone's estate.

'M, a, r . . . ' I'd been musing on those three letters all the way home.

They most likely meant nothing—some last-second word McCawley wanted to get off to God, or an attempt to define the light he'd seen at the fatal ripping of his heart—as in m-a-rvelous. They had not meant Mardukian. They had not meant Marie. But they could have meant mother—as McCawley saw it. The fourth letter for which he groped could have been “e,” which would have spelled “mare,” which is the way you pronounce “mother” in French; which Gautier or any other French-speaking cop might have undersood. And which I, a poor speller, relying often on phonetics, might have done myself. Marie had said Charles had no knack for French. He would have spelled *mère* the way it sounded—mare.

Or it meant nothing—an unfinished thought from his childhood.

It was seven o'clock as we made our way through heavy traffic along Bayshore Freeway. I'd left Geneva at 9:20 that morning and all my instincts were offended. I should have been asleep or eating breakfast or something; not this. I wondered if Lana's biological footing had been shaken a week ago as she'd made essentially the same run as I was just finishing. Or are women different, moon-guided as they are? But I could see her killing him, and understood why now, and the mechanics of it. At Kennedy I'd checked the flight possibilities and they were almost infinite. She could have round-tripped it to Geneva without anyone knowing. You get your passport stamped at both ends of the journey, but if you destroy your passport when you're home there's no other record, and if you don't register at a hotel in Geneva there's no way to prove you were there, assuming you buy your ticket with cash and under the name of Smith.

What I had wanted Edwin to tell me was exactly when he and his mother were together, and for how long and where. He was the energy source of the plot—her fanatical blood-love for him. That, and the circumstances of the company's table of organization setting the stage, primogeniture governing the order of succession, apparently; so that with Charles dead, Bennett becomes the head honcho, and with him dead, the reprobate son, Edwin, owns it all. For him she'd done it, before his older stepbrothers could cut him out entirely—on moral grounds, maybe—and before Bennett's upcoming marriage could produce a challenger to his claim. That had been the catalyst—Bennett's upcoming nuptials.

The cab was parked now across the street from the McCawley home.

Looking at it furtively from the back window, I wondered if he was still alive in there. She'd been poisoning him, I was sure now—some arsenical compound, probably, that pained the joints as it slowly killed. Whatever it was, she'd been feeding it to him for a couple of weeks, forcing, among other effects, Charles to replace him on his scheduled trip to Geneva. Charles had to die first, to reduce the legal confusion and cost—and killing him in Geneva would give her lead time for Bennett's murder. She'd worked it out with some care, but with me in the picture now she'd probably hasten his infusions of poison, maybe give him the fatal dose at once. That was why I hadn't phoned from New York—I didn't want to alarm her.

As it was, I dawdled too long in the cab in front of her house and she must have seen me and made her preparations. I paid the fare, added a ten-dollar bill, and asked the cabbie to wait. Then I walked across the street and up the stone steps to the McCawleys' front door, a work of art in oak.

What I did next, you do not do: you do not push open an ajar front door and walk through it; you push it aside and wait. Ask any rookie cop.

I walked in like an expected guest, but stopped in my tracks after a single pace. She was standing five feet away with a gun in her hand, a .22 target pistol. It wavered wildly—its slug would have caught me anywhere from kneecap to chin—and her eyes weren't much steadier. "He's dead," she said. "You're too late."

"Then you don't have to shoot me, do you?"

"I could have made it work but for you."

"No," I said. "You left your prints on the gun in Geneva."

"I meant to. In case Edwin didn't believe me. In case I had to prove it to him that I'd do anything for him."

"He doesn't know you killed Charles?"

"No."

"But he would know you killed Bennett. Everybody would know."

"No. Bennett was going to drown. He was going to fall off his boat. But then he called you. It would have worked except for you. But it doesn't matter if everybody knows—the company is Edwin's now and they can't take it away from him. Nobody can. They've wanted to all this time. They hated him—they hated me." A strand of that awful reddish hair fell across her eyes and as she shook it away, the gun went off, the slug singeing the hair on my left wrist as it passed. It shocked her and

I stepped forward and lifted the gun from her rigid hand. "They hated me," she said, "for marrying their father. They thought I wasn't good enough."

"I don't think Bennett hated you, Lana. I think you imagined that."

"Oh, yes he did—you don't know."

"Where is he?" I said.

"He's upstairs in bed."

"Did you shoot him?"

"No. I didn't need to. He was dead from his dinner."

Outside, the cab driver was standing alongside the open door of his car, a CB mike in his hand. He'd heard the shot and was squinting at me. I mouthed the word "police" at him and he nodded.

Then I went upstairs and found Bennett still alive, flecks of foam at the corners of his mouth but breath still in his throat, shallow and slow. I picked up the phone on the table next to his bed and called for an ambulance.

Their wedding is tomorrow, delayed by only two weeks. I have an invitation in my hand signed by them both with a special note urging me to attend—if not the ceremony, the reception in the house afterward. But I don't think I will. The moment might come when Marie and that view fell within a single sweep of my eye, and I don't think I could handle that.

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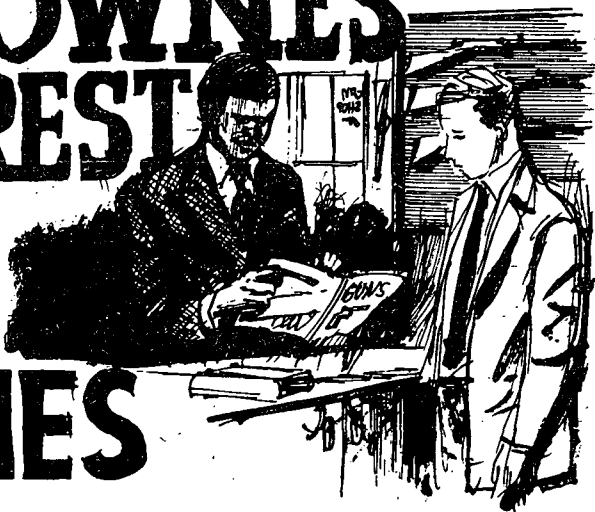
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*The gun was loaded, but how could it have been? . . .*

# LEO BROWNE'S ARREST

by  
L. F.  
JAMES



“ ‘But, officer,’ I said, tears streaming down my cheeks, ‘I didn’t know it was loaded.’ ”

I refolded the manuscript and plunked myself down on the sofa opposite Leo Browne’s rocking chair. The black man’s sightless eyes couldn’t see what I had done, but his ears were sharp enough and he moved his head to face my new position.

“Go on,” he said. “Then what happens?”



"Then nothing happens," I retorted. "That's the end of the story."

"Man," he said, shaking his head, "you ever consider giving up this mystery writing and getting yourself an honest job? You ain't going nowhere with an ending like that."

I tossed the story onto the coffee table between us and sat back with my hands behind my head. "Why not? The magazine I have in mind likes surprise endings."

"That's just the problem, Larry. What's so surprising about that line? 'I didn't know it was loaded,' " he mimicked.

I sighed. He was getting under my skin because subconsciously I knew he was right. I guess that's why I always read my stories to him—he can catch any technical errors I make regarding firearms and ammunition, since he's a serious collector of pistols and revolvers, a true authority on the subject; and his quick mind and his love of mystery fiction make him an ideal sounding board for my new stuff.

But I felt I had to defend my story.

"Maybe you weren't listening closely enough when I set up that ending," I ventured. "You see—"

"Hold it, Larry. You sound pretty hoarse after all that reading. How's about pouring us the usual?"

I got up and walked over to his bar. As I mixed the drinks, I thought about the other reason I liked Leo's company. He'd had quite an interesting career and could always be counted on to relate an anecdote or two that might eventually make a good story. Like the one about the deadly "wadcutter" cartridges that so closely resemble harmless blanks. I'd have to use that one someday.

I turned back to him and handed him his drink.

" 'I didn't know it was loaded,' " he was musing. "You know, I don't think I ever told you about the time I shot a man with a gun I *knew* was loaded. But I had no idea how it *could* have been loaded under the circumstances. And I was arrested for it too."

I abandoned any idea of defending my story and settled down to listen.

This goes back a good quarter of a century [Leo continued], back to when I was in my early thirties. I had just been given a bonus for a nice piece of private investigation, and of course I went right out to spend it on some guns.

I went to my favorite gun store and looked around, having a good old

time, that bonus money burning a hole in my pocket. The only damper was that the proprietor, Jake, was in the hospital with his appendix or something and I missed chatting with him. His brother-in-law, Wilbur, was in charge and he didn't have much to say to me nor I to him. I spent a good twenty minutes or so checking out the rifle and shotgun displays, although it was a pistol I really wanted. I had the whole store to myself.

I started browsing through the catalogues on the counter.

"How about these new Walther automatics?" I asked Wilbur, pointing to a page in one of the brochures. "Have you got any in stock yet?"

"Sure have," Wilbur responded. "Would you like to see one?"

I said I would and Wilbur took a key from the chain at his waist and bent to unlock the cabinet behind the counter. I noticed he wasn't wearing a gun. Jake always did, and I can't say I blamed him, with all the firearms and ammo he kept in the place, and most likely a good deal of cash as well. But Wilbur wasn't much of a shot, as I recalled, and it was probably just as well he went unarmed. Nowadays I daresay you'd never find an unarmed clerk in a gun store.

Well, Wilbur brought out that Walther, and it was a beauty. We stood there looking at it in its fitted case for a moment, then Wilbur said, "Go ahead, pick it up and get the feel of it."

I took his advice, and immediately noticed it was loaded. I could tell from the weight that there had to be a full clip in the butt, and I'll be darned if there wasn't a cartridge in the chamber as well. I could tell because the signal pin was sticking out. I'm an even-tempered fellow, I guess, but if there's one thing that makes me madder'n hell it's carelessness with firearms. I've seen a few accidental shootings in my time, and I swear that every one of them could have been prevented.

"She's a beaut, isn't she?" Wilbur said. "In fact, a fellow—"

I was waiting for him to close his mouth so I could open mine and give him a lecture for leaving it loaded when a chap barged in, waved a revolver, and told Wilbur: "All the cash in a bag, pal. Throw in two or three nice pieces and ammo to match."

Before Wilbur had a chance to respond I thumbed the safety off the Walther and raised it nice and slow, drew a bead on the thug, and said, "Drop it, or you're a dead man."

He turned to face me and started to sneer. He lowered his gun slightly, having seen that Wilbur was unarmed and that the open display box for the Walther was on the counter.

"They don't *come* loaded, boy," he said. "Or don't you know that?" I stayed as cool as I could. "Drop it or I'll shoot," I repeated.

He started to raise his gun again, and I fired a warning shot past his right shoulder—at least that's what I meant to do, but darned if I didn't hit him. His revolver went clattering to the floor and he followed, clutching his shoulder. I ran forward and snatched up his gun. Wilbur was already dialing the phone.

I gingerly laid the Walther back in its case and placed the thief's revolver on the counter next to it.

"I don't think I'll take this one after all," I said to Wilbur. "The sights aren't very accurate."

A car screeched to a halt outside and the sheriff burst in. He slapped a pair of handcuffs on the man on the floor. "An ambulance is on the way," he said, then proceeded to get our story. He frowned and looked at Wilbur questioningly when I said the Walther had been loaded in the case.

"Don't look at me," Wilbur said. "I didn't load it! Why would I?"

"Well, neither would Jake," I said.

"Look, boys, they don't load them at the factory," the sheriff said. He looked at me. "You bought this pistol?"

"No, sir. I was just looking at it."

"Come on," he said. "If you loaded it just to see how it works, you'd better tell me now. We can do the paperwork now and say you bought it before you loaded it. I know you're licensed."

"But, Sheriff," I insisted, "I ain't buying this gun. I was just looking at it. And it *was* loaded in the box. I was just about to chew Wilbur out for it when this guy burst in."

"O.K." The sheriff sighed. "It ain't that important. Stick to your story if you must. The grand jury ain't gonna be all that interested in *how* it got loaded, anyway."

"The grand jury?"

"Sure, the grand jury. We got us two cases here. Attempted armed robbery for him, and then, of course, your shooting him."

The ambulance came then and in no time at all they had that robber in the hospital and me down at the police station.

Sure enough, my case went before a grand jury. I was a bit heated up about it at first, seeing as how I'd shot in self-defense and all, and the

last thing I needed was an indictment on my record, no matter what the outcome of the trial. But the jury, God bless 'em, refused to hand down an indictment and the matter was dropped. I learned later that the prosecutor hinted pretty broadly to the jury that there was no law said they had to indict me—all the law really said was that he had to bring the case up before them.

So that's how I came to be arrested—the only time in my life, I might add—and you can see what it came to. But one thing still bothered me, and that was how that automatic happened to be loaded in the first place. I had to wait till Jake was out of the hospital before I got an answer.

When I heard he was back at the store I paid him a visit.

"Jake," I said, "how'd that piece get loaded?"

"Everybody's asking me that," he answered, "and I'm damned if I know. It wasn't loaded when it came from the distributor and I locked it in the cabinet. I gave Wilbur the third degree but he's as stumped as I am."

We stood looking at each other for a moment, then Jake straightened up as if he had a sudden idea. "Let me check the books," he said.

He rummaged through a ledger and a pile of sales receipts for a while, then came back to me with two pieces of paper in his hand, smiling and shaking his head. "Here's something," he announced, "but I want to get Wilbur over here."

He made the call, and it wasn't long before Wilbur joined us.

"Wilbur, take a look at these," Jake said.

Wilbur looked at the sales receipts for a bit, scratching his head. "Well," he said, "I don't rightly see nothing here. These're from while you were in the hospital. Mr. Adams bought a pistol, then changed his mind and exchanged it."

"What pistol, Wilbur? What does it say there?"

Wilbur took another look. "Well, I'll be! The new Walther!"

"Right, Wilbur," Jake said kindly, "the Walther. Why'd you let him exchange it?"

"Why not, Jake? He swore he'd never fired it."

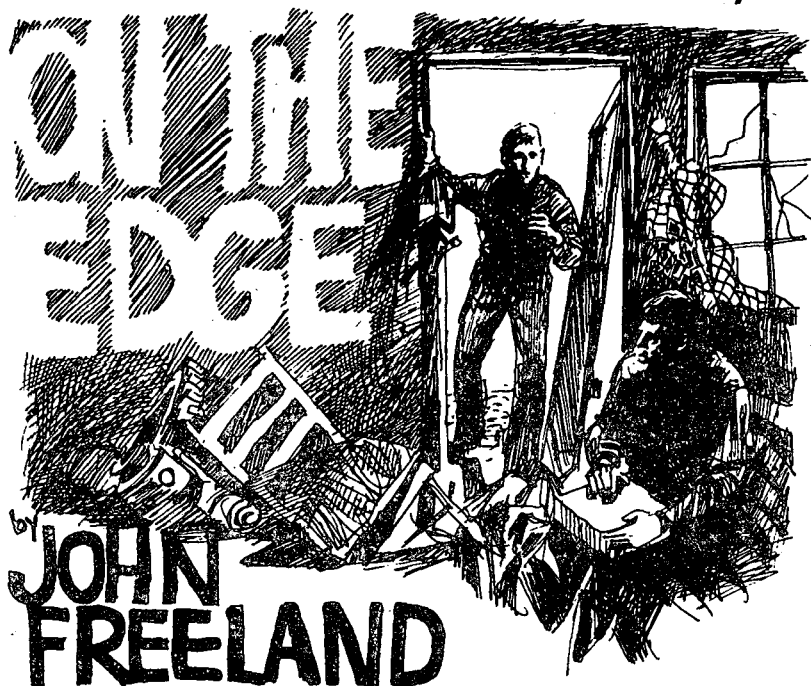
Jake and I were laughing now. "I declare, Wilbur, Mr. Adams is as careless as you are. Did he say he never *loaded* it too?"

Wilbur laughed, embarrassed.

"Why'd he change his mind, Wil?" I wanted to know.

"He said the sights didn't suit him."

*The Barber was terrorizing the city . . .*



The story I'm most often asked to tell by talk-show hosts, reporters, ambitious beginners, or the just plain envious is about the time we caught the Barber and made the first million-dollar sale in publishing history. I figure if I put it down here I won't keep having to repeat it, so this seems as good a place as any to begin.

I got my start in the business in 1965 under Jack MacNamara at Writers' Management, where I was put in charge of the low-grade ore: the dozens  
ON THE EDGE

of calls and visits every day from new writers who'd never made a sale. I'd been at it about a year. There was something spooky in the similarity of all those calls, as if they'd all agreed on the same line beforehand and were spacing their calls at deliberate five-minute intervals. But the Old Man insisted I listen politely to every single one. He'd say, "You never know but one of them might be the next Norman Mailer." The experience and wisdom in that crazy policy became clear to me soon enough. Jack was right—that, and not million-dollar sales, got me where I am today.

I was on my second cup of coffee when the day's first call came and, whoever the poor guy was, he'd already ruined his career as far as I was concerned. There may be literary agents who don't mind being called at 9:10 in the morning, but I haven't met one yet. "There's a guy on two who wants some information," said the switchboard girl.

Holding the chilly receiver four inches from my ear I punched line two and said, "Nick Palmer. What can I do for you?"

I heard nothing and then realized the man was speaking in a whisper, so I reluctantly touched the phone to my ear. Out of it came a voice so clotted with desperation and disgust that I looked at the phone as if it might have been responsible. In tone, though, it was bland—he might have been a bank teller with a sore throat.

"This is the Barber," said the voice.

I believed him. I believed him that instant without wondering or doubting or thinking about it long enough for an impulse to jump from one nerve to the next. Who else could speak like that, could terrify and alarm with only the sound of his voice?

The Barber, if any of you don't recall, was at that time scaring New York silly with a series of awful, bloody murders—I think he was up to twelve at the time. They were senseless, arbitrary, unpredictable killings, committed with a barber's razor (the *Daily News* reporter who came up with the killer's nickname presumably got a raise and a promotion). It had been going on for six months and for a while it was the biggest story in the city. A publisher had been quoted saying he'd pay a million dollars for the Barber's own true story.

"I have a manuscript."

If it sounds a little ghoulish now to say I nearly choked with the joy and excitement of it, remember I was still new and stood to make the Old Man a \$100,000 commission my first year on the job. If I could bring it off, my career was made.



"Is it true what they say about the million dollars?"

"Yes—and probably much more." Ghoulis—*I know.*

"I read about your boss in *Newsweek*. He's the guy I want to handle my book. Let me talk to him."

Great. I'm going to turn my million-dollar baby over to the Old Man—who'll get the money anyway—so he can go on the *Tonight Show*, hold press conferences, and go on being the F. Lee Bailey of literary agents. Isn't he famous enough already?

"He won't be in till Monday."

"I'll call back then."

"Yes, but he'll be in for just an hour, then he's going off to London for three weeks. We might have to put this off till he returns—if you insist on dealing with him."

The Barber should have known that literary agents don't keep million-dollar manuscripts waiting for *anything*, but it was all I could think of—even with the chance that, like any author, he'd resent being fobbed off. "Here's what we can do, though. Let's arrange for you to get the manuscript to me and I'll see it's delivered to Mr. MacNamara as soon as possible. This way we can give it a reading in the meantime."

There was silence, then a sigh. "All right. I've worked out a place we can do this without being seen. Go to Belvedere Castle at one o'clock tonight. On the downtown side is a metal door with a padlock. The lock will be open. Step inside and close the door behind you, and don't bring a light. I'll give you the manuscript then. If there's anyone with you I'll be gone before you see me and I'll call some other agent—someone tough and hungry enough to come alone." He was trying to make *himself* sound tough, like a kid who's pulled his daddy's gun on a burglar—nervous but scary. It worked pretty well.

"I'll be there," I said, and he hung up.

At 12:30 I was outside the entrance to Central Park at Eighty-first Street and Central Park West, the so-called "Naturalist's Gate." Beyond the gap in the thick fieldstone walls was the wilderness they say it's suicide to enter after dark, populated only by addicts and other desperadoes—and the occasional homicidal maniac. I put my chances at about one in ten even *without* the Barber waiting for me in there.

I stepped in gingerly, darted across a few yards of grass and across Park Drive, then hesitated at the edge of the forest that covers much of the

ON THE EDGE

park at that point. Finally, I found a paved path into the woods and crept into the darkness. There were old-fashioned iron streetlamps, their posts painted green, stuck here and there among the trees; I had to steer clear of their orange light to remain invisible. Even the police don't walk around there at night; every opening between the trees led off into black hiding places where evil would logically go to spend the night.

The path led up a steep hill and became a staircase made of cracked old logs embedded in the cement. At the top was a clearing, in the middle of which is Belvedere Castle, not a castle at all but a granite shack made of rough-hewn bricks, and surely not tidied up since its mortar dried in 1871. I trotted up the last few steps and stopped when I reached the cement plaza surrounding the Castle. I could see the rusty metal door with its brass lock hanging loose.

I pushed open the door into a room in which I could barely make out heaps of rotting furniture, sections of chain-link fence, broken lampposts, mysterious machines (a lawnmower?), leaving almost no room to move. At the other end of the room, sitting on what looked like an old park bench, was a man dressed like myself all in black. On his lap was a brown cardboard box.

"Palmer?"

I nodded in the gloom.

"Here she is." He waved the box, then set it down on the floor at his feet.

I started to make my way toward him through the clutter but saw him leave through a back door just as I reached the box. My heart beating heavily, I opened it. There, neatly typed, was a manuscript with a modest title page: *On the Edge* by "The Barber."

I got a cab home, threw the manuscript on the bed, climbed in after it, and started to read.

Standing in a jammed subway car, confused from lack of sleep, I took my usual look around to see if there were any drunks, lunatics, or potential muggers nearby, and saw the morning's *News* headline an inch from the nose of a man next to me: FIND BARBER'S 13TH VICTIM IN CENTRAL PARK.

I picked up a *Times* in the lobby, rushed into my little office, had my calls held, put three teaspoons of instant coffee into a cup of hot water, shut the door, lit a cigarette, wiped my face with a napkin, and read the article. Time of death: between 10:00 P.M. and midnight. He must have

had the script in his hands and our appointment on his mind as he killed.

Ten days later we were ready to put *On the Edge* up for auction. With me in my office as I checked the last copy to make sure it was properly boxed and labeled were three special messengers hired for the occasion and a man from the New York City Police Department named Mike Bernstein, who was staring at page 123 of the manuscript as if it foretold the future.

The messengers, each hefting fifteen photocopies of the script in identical blue boxes, received their final instructions and headed out the door. I buzzed Jack and told him, "They're on their way."

"Nice going, kid," he answered, which was about as close to a compliment as he ever got. Calling the police—which I'd done out of sheer terror the morning after receiving the manuscript—turned out to be a smart business move. It was Bernstein who insisted we proceed with the auction as a means of keeping the Barber on the hook. And he had also insisted that Jack not interfere, since I'd made first contact and the Barber seemed to have come to like and trust me since. The project was all mine.

"I still don't get this," Mike was saying. "How do you know for sure the Barber didn't go to Harvard?" He waved page 123 in the air. It contained an anecdote about a Harvard professor who'd introduced the Barber to Shakespeare. It was one of the "clues" Mike had gone nuts trying to follow up on. He'd checked with Harvard and none of the details fit. Yet he was convinced the script was the key. Perhaps because it was the only lead he had, he couldn't believe the Barber would be deceitful in his own autobiography.

"Look, Mike, I think it's obvious by now that a lot of this stuff is made up. You've had ten days to check into it. The guy has some imagination and he thinks of himself as a creative writer. It's not his real story at all."

"So what am I doing here with this damn *novel*?" he said, as if the word was a synonym for fraud and chicanery.

"It's *not* a novel. The thing is real—if you know how to read it. Let me show you again."

I pulled page 237 from my copy: the description of the Barber's first murder. It was the most gripping, vivid, blood-curdling crime writing I'd ever encountered. "Here, read this again. This is how it really happened." He read, and his fingertips whitened with horror and anger as

he gripped the page. You could see that he believed, and that he wanted this guy more than he'd ever wanted anything. It was rough stuff, enough to inflame even an experienced cop like Mike.

"Yeah," he said, "but what makes this real and not the Harvard stuff?"

"The details. Look. Her red lipstick. Her tweed jacket and matching brown skirt. How he nicked himself accidentally with the razor. How someone walked by just two feet away without noticing anything. How she looked at him before she died. How she fell against his leg after trying to get up again. How he suddenly remembered he didn't have a subway token to get home. Only two kinds of people could have written this: a real killer or a professional novelist."

"What if he is a real writer, trying to make a million by passing this off as the real thing?"

"I thought of that, but I don't buy it. Most of the book isn't at this level—the sections the Barber is making up. The sentences are too awkward, the rhythm is choppy. And the structure's all wrong: too many long interior monologues, too much space wasted on self-justification and philosophy, too few good action scenes—the suspense is usually ruined by those awful transitions."

"What about a writer deliberately faking that to make it *look* real?"

"You'll have to trust me on that. I've read more than five hundred over-the-transom submissions and I know how beginners write, the feel of it. This guy's never published before, believe me."

"So what about this Harvard stuff? It's got real details too."

"No, that junk about ivy-covered buildings is what anyone would say about Harvard, even if he'd never been off Coney Island. He'd point out things that really spell Harvard to a Harvard man."

"Like what?"

"Hell, I don't know, some work that needs doing in Harvard Yard, the way the moon doesn't hang over the Charles. I was only there one time."

"So this is just a lot of claptrap, right? Nothing to do with Harvard."

"No, I don't think that's right either. The guy wants us to *think* he went to Harvard. Maybe he wishes he had. You don't make up something like this without giving away something about yourself. But I thought the upstate sections were pretty believable, and since he seems to have Ivy League on the brain, maybe he went to one of those newish schools like mine that get you thinking about ivy-covered walls. It's worth looking around up there, I think."

"I'll check it out," he said, and hurried out.

It was two weeks to the auction deadline, and the time passed slowly. The Barber called every other day to see how things were coming along, always keeping it to a minute or so to keep the call from being traced. And always at the same damn time, 9:10 in the morning. He seemed to relish his role as a big-time commercial author; at the least, it must have quieted whatever demons drove him to kill because there were no new murders.

Mike checked out some of the upstate colleges and found a Shakespeare instructor at Albany who fit the description of the Barber's professor. Unfortunately, he claimed to have had hundreds of students in his career in whom he'd instilled a first passion for Shakespeare, and wasn't much help.

I'd gone through the script carefully with Mike and pointed out the sections that rang true to me and those I felt had their truths hidden beneath fiction, and we began to get a clearer picture of our man.

The Barber was in his early thirties, a native New Yorker from a lower-class background, an only child, father dead, mother a rather elegant woman from a wealthier family but who'd had to go to work to support the family. He'd felt neglected, his mother too busy to pay attention to what he felt was his great potential (though in what field he didn't know). He became a great dreamer, an addicted reader, and, though he did poorly in school, he wrote poetry and stories for hours every day. Not many friends, not much success with women. Conceited, even arrogant, but with no idea how to make his big dreams come true.

There was something about a trip to London after high school and a girl (whom Mike was desperately trying to locate) with whom the Barber had had his first, brief love affair. Then the story broke down badly, and I didn't buy ninety-five percent of it. But with the first murder it became credible again.

The bids came in on deadline day like we were selling the secret of eternal life, with Austen, Hedrick & Company the winners with a bid of \$1,000,100 (Foundation Press just wouldn't go the extra hundred and dropped out in exhaustion), against a straight fifteen-percent royalty and \$100,000 escalator if we made a motion-picture sale.

There was a catch, though. The AH editor behind the deal was Stephen Lomax, a great editor with thirty years of experience. He saw all the

inconsistencies, stylistic flaws, and structural problems I'd seen, plus some I'd missed. He insisted on substantial revisions, which I had to promise him before he'd close the deal. He made most of the money due after delivery and acceptance of the revisions.

You could never do the job in a letter. The Barber wouldn't stay on the line long enough for a phone call. And at fifty-nine Steve wasn't about to share a park bench in Belvedere Castle with the Barber. It was going to be up to me.

The happy author called in the next morning at the usual time, and I gave him the big news. He surprised me by reacting the same way anyone would—whooping and hollering, saying “I can't believe it,” things like that.

I explained about the revisions and he promised full cooperation. “As soon as the contract is signed, I'll do whatever Mr. Lomax would like me to do,” he said.

I'd explained to him beforehand that while he couldn't sign his real name to a contract, no publisher would pay out a million dollars on a contract signed only “The Barber,” but Jack had thought up a way around the problem. The Barber would sign over his power of attorney to our lawyer, Charley Reich, who would then sign the contract for him. Lawyer-client confidentiality would protect his identity, and the monies would flow through Charley—the checks would be made payable to him and he'd then deposit them through the mail in an out-of-state bank.

Austen, Hedrick agreed to pay out on this basis, and the Barber was content with the arrangement. The only one who wasn't happy was poor Charley, who told me the New York State law on confidentiality was weak when it came to capital offenses. I urged him to put off worrying about the Barber's continued freedom until a later date—say, when hell froze over—but it was the ethics of it that worried him. The power of attorney arrived in the mail a few days later, and Mike immediately asked to see it. Charley, miserable and uncertain, refused, but did give him the envelope to trace. We soon had the initial payment of \$22,500 en route to a Virginia bank.

The Barber was due at my place at eight that night for our first work session. Mike had thought the Barber would never go for the meeting, but I knew from his manuscript that he wouldn't object. The agent/author relationship can be something special with writers whose insecurity makes them susceptible—no different from the patient who'll follow his doctor's

advice without asking any questions. Perhaps it's because the agent is the one person on whose flattery the author can always depend as long as he deals keep coming in; perhaps because the author, out of touch and over his head, depends totally on the agent to keep the checks coming, the rights protected, the publishers interested; perhaps because the agent is also dependent on the writer and presumably would never allow him to be hurt. I don't know why or how it works, and God knows it often doesn't, but the Barber trusted the man who'd made him a millionaire, and who he believed had believed in him as a writer.

That night Mike and a team of three police technicians wired my living room for sound and installed a tiny camera inside the pillowcase, hung from a nail, in which I keep my socks. All they wanted was to know who he was. From there, retracing his steps and building a case that would hold up in court wouldn't, with any luck, be hard.

The Barber surprised me again by looking unexotic. He had yet to display a single characteristic that would mark him as a killer. He was about thirty, with sandy hair starting to thin and a wispy blond moustache. He looked as if he spent most of his day saying "Cash or charge?" We had a good, productive session that lasted until dawn, and I found him pleasant to work with—the disgust and terror seemed to have been leached out of his system by success. When we could bear no more I saw him down to the street and watched as the '59 Chevy carrying two shadows from the NYPD rolled quietly after him.

Trudging slowly back upstairs, I tried to piece together what I'd learned about our man during the night. Back on my floor, I knocked three times at the apartment next to mine and Mike let me in.

He'd made a terrible mess of poor Sally's place, and it had been difficult enough to convince her to spend the night at a girl friend's. Cigarette butts, styrofoam cups, and sandwich crusts were everywhere but in the garbage.

"Well, that was a big washout," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Christ, ten hours of structure this and local color that, increase the suspense here and add drama there. I got nothing I can use out of this night—all you did was talk about your stupid book. Couldn't you get him to talk about himself, draw him out a little? What a waste of time! I just hope the pictures turn out O.K."

"Mike."

He ignored me and started to put on his shoes.

"Mike. Our guy is a high-school English teacher in the New York City schools. It should be easy to track him down from that."

"What? How'd you know that?" He put down his left shoe, ready to be convinced.

"You remember about eleven when we took our first break? I made coffee and we talked about books and writing for a while?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"I was telling him about some of the other writers we handle at the agency, some stories about famous writers I'd worked with, books I'd worked on. He was enjoying it, you remember?"

"Uh-huh."

"He loved hearing about what it was like to be a real writer, how it worked on the inside, that sort of thing. He got a real kick out of it. Anyway, we handle a few famous science-fiction writers, and I asked him if he ever read any of that stuff. He told me no, he didn't go for it at all. So I told him about Hal Bertelstrom, and how he was this science-fiction writer he ought to check out—a very serious writer, really great stuff."

"Anyway?"

"Anyway, he surprised me by saying yes, Bertelstrom was the real thing, he would definitely have to read some of his novels. Said he'd read one of his short stories and thought it was terrific. I asked which, and he said 'Escape Velocity'—that's one of the stories I sold myself, right after I started out."

"So?"

"'Escape Velocity' was written on assignment for Foundation Press for a new textbook they're doing called *Studies in Science Fiction*. They couldn't find a Bertelstrom that was clean enough, so they commissioned one. I got them to pay five hundred dollars for it."

"And the point?"

"The point is that only three kinds of people would have read that story—kids assigned to it, which he isn't; SF fans, which he isn't; or an English teacher making up his lesson plan—which he must be."

"And how do you know he teaches in New York?"

"I don't, but he asked me for a subway token as he was leaving, so I figure he must live in town. If he taught in the suburbs he'd most likely live there."



"Nick, baby," he said, and quickly tied his shoes.

The shadows had lost our friend in Central Park—they said he slipped away somewhere in The Ramble, where you could lose an elephant. My guess is they were just afraid to follow him in there. Mike had his pictures, but I was still the only one who'd had a good look at him, so I set off the next morning with the cops to track down the killer teacher. They wanted to start in Queens or Brooklyn, but I swung them to Manhattan's Upper West Side.

There was a passage in *On the Edge* where he wrote about a beautiful girl he'd seen at the IRT Broadway Eighty-sixth Street station, a description so vivid and precise I had to believe he knew the station brick by brick. My guess was he went there every morning and evening to and from school.

We tried to dress like visiting-teacher types and went to the nearest high school. After getting permission to prowl the corridors I spotted him quickly enough through the glass partition of a classroom door, standing in front of about forty fifteen-year-olds, talking, a piece of chalk in his left hand.

Afterwards I rushed back to the office and tried to catch up on the paperwork that mounts up after just a morning's absence, and Mike joined me there a few hours later. He had the Barber's name, address, employment history, medical charts, everything—even an explanation of why the calls always came at 9:10—he was hall monitor then and could slip away to an isolated phone booth near the cafeteria.

"So?" I said. "Why don't you have him in handcuffs? Are you waiting for recess?"

"My friend, all we can prove is some guy wrote a book about the Barber and came to your apartment to talk about it. We can't ask for the death penalty just because *you* think his book is 'credible and rings true.' Try explaining that in court!"

"Death penalty?"

"You betcha. But we're putting a twenty-four-hour tail on him—and it sticks with him until he tries it again. *Then* we'll get him."

"It won't work. He's not going to kill again, at least not for a long time. I don't understand the guy, of course, but there must have been a connection between the killings and his self-image as a writer. When I first

spoke to him I knew I was speaking to a killer. He had it in his voice—it was terrifying. But you heard him at my place; that's gone out of him now. He's a million-dollar author and that's what he always wanted to be. He can get all the kicks he needs just by looking in the mirror and saying, 'Hi, writer!' He doesn't seem to *need* to kill any more."

Mike looked glum, resting his chin on his hand and staring out the window.

"But I think I could arrange for him to kill again—say tomorrow night."

He gave me a look that said, "Whatever you can do," and watched as I swiveled to the phone. "The *Post* has been after this story all week," I said, "but I've kept my mouth shut. Now they'll get themselves a headline."

I spoke into the phone. "Ralph? Ralph, it's Nick Palmer at Writers' Management. Got a pen?"

It was on page one of the next afternoon's *Post*, in the lower left corner:  
BARBER'S MEMOIRS SOLD FOR \$1 MIL

Beneath it was this story:

Agent Nicholas Palmer of Writers' Management Agency revealed exclusively to this reporter that he has sold a manuscript written by the crazed killer all New York has been calling "The Barber" to Austen, Hedrick & Company for an advance "well into seven figures." Telling a hair-raising story of secret meetings and midnight conferences in Central Park, Palmer told of his three-week relationship with the killer as the two put the manuscript together with the knowledge of the New York City Police.

Palmer described the killer as a "pathetic would-be writer without an ounce of talent or ability, whose bloodlust has made him the most lucrative property in publishing history."

Stressing that the book will contain a "true, graphic history of the man, including each of the killings as they really happened," Palmer promised readers a "compelling story in which drama and violence will more than make up for the embarrassingly bad writing."

(continued on page 3)

The paper hit the streets around noon, and he was on the phone at

one. This time I didn't take the call. He called eighteen more times before I knocked off at five. Each time he was told I was out, on another line, eating lunch, had someone in my office, or was in a meeting. He was experiencing the classic agent's freeze-out for the first time.

I headed straight home and poured myself a Jack Daniels (my one drink for times of crisis), then six more, got into bed, and waited for my million-dollar baby to hit bottom.

It was the lead story on the eleven o'clock news. They'd followed him home from the school as Mike had promised, then waited outside his front door until about eight. He came out dressed in black. He was shadowed by plainclothesmen until he entered Central Park at 8:30. They watched as he sat inside Belvedere Castle, then crept down the hill behind him as he homed in on a girl sitting by the lake—she was just off the plane from Puerto Rico and didn't know the park was unsafe after dark. The cops hid as he approached her and jumped out as he drew the razor and held it to her throat. Four of them had then wrestled him to the ground and he was now in a maximum-security cell at Bellevue Hospital, to begin undergoing psychological testing in the morning.

Incidentally, Austen, Hedrick never made back much of that advance. I think they've still got copies of *On the Edge* rotting in their warehouse. There's no substitute for talent.



The January 30 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale January 3.

*There were sixteen men named Carlos Hernandez on the island . . .*

# LOOKING FOR CARLOS HERNANDEZ

by  
**KENNETH  
GAURELL**



**"Come in,"** he said, and I didn't like the sound of his voice even before I saw his face.

It was an office that had a view of the high rises in the Condado and the slums along the Martin Peña Canal. The slums were closer, but I figured a guy like this could look out over them without any neck strain.

"You're the private detective," he said.

"That's right."

He waved me toward a chair in front of his desk, a nice leather job, cream-colored and deep-seated.

"How private?" he said.

"Twenty-five-dollars-an-hour private. You don't have to worry about my mouth, Mr. Lyons, just about my brains."

"This is a job that requires a bit of—discretion." He rubbed a well manicured hand across his balding pate. The hair—what there was of it—was salt and pepper. The body was fit. The skin was a bit too pink.

"I don't like the whole idea," he said. "But I'm afraid it's—necessary." He had an annoying way of pausing before squeezing out a word.

"That's why PIs exist," I said. "I charge twenty-five dollars an hour."

"I don't care about the money," he said.

"I know you don't."

"You've heard of me."

"No, I did a little checking."

"I'm not sure I like that."

"I'm not sure I'm going to like whatever your proposition is."

"Do you always walk around with a chip on your shoulder?" he asked.

"Not always," I said. "I have a prejudice against rich American businessmen. Especially on an island where a third of the people are below poverty level. My mother was Puerto Rican."

"I like Puerto Rico," he said. "That's why I'm here. I've lived here fifteen years."

"Good," I said. "I thought it might be the corporate tax exemption or the lack of a federal minimum wage."

"I don't think we're going to get along," Lyons said.

"I'll leave."

"Sit down," he said.

I sat down again.

"I did some checking too. They say you're about the best in San Juan."

"Thank you."

"They also say you can be bad-mannered and hot-headed."

"Thank you."

He relaxed into his commodious swivel chair. "One thing I do like," he said. "You're honest."

"Yes," I said. "With that and ten cents . . ."

He smiled. He took a cigar out of a box on his desk and pushed the box toward me.

"I've got my own," I said, pulling out my cigarettes.

"It's my wife," Lyons said, snipping the end of his cigar. "This is—not easy. I think she's seeing another man."

Oh, Christ, I thought. Not another one of those. I'd expected something better.

"You've done this sort of thing before."

"Yes. I hate it."

"The proof I need may run up a lot of twenty-five-dollar hours."

"Plus expenses."

"Of course."

I looked out at the slums along the canal. No sewage system there. No dollar cigars.

"Fill me in," I said.

"His name's Carlos Hernandez. He spends a lot of time at the casinos and the race track—so does my wife, Vera."

"Is he rich?"

"I don't think so. If so, it's not from any legitimate business."

"Puerto Rican?"

"Yes. From somewhere out on the island, I think."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose he's good-looking."

"I have a picture here. As you'll see, he's a ladies' man."

He reached into the drawer of his expansive desk and pulled out a blurry black-and-white snapshot. I studied it. You could make out the features all right. Hernandez was good-looking, fortyish.

"Where'd you get the photo?" I asked.

"That's my business."

"All right. How long has he been seeing your wife?"

"It's hard to say. A few weeks maybe. Do you carry a gun?"

"Not usually. Why?"

"I thought you people did. Hernández may. He has gambling connections."

"I don't think I'll need a gun on this one."

"I suppose you know your own business," Lyons said. The air was full of his heavy cigar smoke. He passed me a card. "This is my home address—it's in the hills near Trujillo Alto—in case you want to get in touch with me outside office hours. The phone number's there."

"Is your wife likely to answer?"

"She's not often home," Lyons said. The way he said it I almost felt sorry for him. I'd been married once myself.

"I'll let you know what develops," I said. "You can trust me."

"I know," he said.

"Why?"

"Because you're such an independent son of a bitch."

I had nothing else going right then that couldn't wait, so I decided to give Mrs. Lyons my full attention for a few days—if it took a few days. She had her own car, a very nice red Cutlass with a white vinyl top. It stood out a hell of a lot more than my mustard Toyota—about as common a car as you'll find in San Juan. I had seen Lyons on Tuesday. On Tuesday evening, Mrs. Lyons and I went to the San Juan Hotel casino. She was an attractive woman, about thirty-three, I guessed—which made her about a dozen years younger than her husband. She had the porcelain-doll look of so many pretty American women of her social class. The wind wouldn't dare muss her hairdo. She played high at the crap tables, and from my count of her chips, I'd say she dropped a thousand in less than two hours. She surprised me by not chasing her bad luck and we went to bed early. No sign of any Carlos Hernandez that night.

On Wednesday I was waiting for her outside her house at noon. Her husband had told me she seldom got up before then. At twelve-thirty she came out of the drive in her Cutlass. We went shopping together in Plaza Carolina Mall where she bought a chic evening dress at Piccadilly and see-through pajamas at Gonzalez Padin. Then she had a couple of late-afternoon cocktails and went home. I had dinner. That night we went to a movie, *An Unmarried Woman*. I didn't like it but I think she did. Another early night. Still no Hernandez.

Thursday was much the same story. A visit with some friends, more shopping, a few drinks before dinnertime. When her Cutlass pulled out of the drive at eight o'clock that evening, I was already bored with the job. It looked like Lyons was all wet about the lover. She drove to the San Juan Hotel again and headed for the casino. When I saw her ensconced at her favorite crap table, I made my phone call to Lyons. I was keeping him up to date on her activities at least once a day. He always seemed to be close to the telephone.

I came back to the casino and found that she'd moved to the more

sedate group around the roulette wheel. She was shepherding a stack of chips that should keep her going a while even at roulette. She played about five numbers a spin. She hit once while I watched. I almost missed it because at just that moment I glanced up from the wheel to the line of faces across the table and found myself looking into the dark Don Juan eyes of Mr. Carlos Hernandez.

Then I looked at her. She was looking at him, and from the way she looked at him I knew Lyons had been right. She picked up her chips and started for the window. Hernandez sauntered toward the door. I waited to follow her out and saw he was waiting at her car. Did that mean he didn't have one? They kissed, and she walked around and slid in behind the wheel.

They gave me a merry run for it. Apparently she drove faster when her spirits were high. We tooted out of Isla Verde heading east along Baldorioty and then caught the lagoon highway into Rio Piedras. I wondered where the hell they were going. In Rio Piedras she took the Caguas road south. About fifteen minutes down the Caguas road she made a sudden right turn into a narrow, climbing road. There wasn't much traffic here and I hung far back. She finally pulled into a drive lit up with a big yellow neon sign that said Motel El Presidente. She didn't have much style for a rich businessman's wife. Maybe she enjoyed the feeling of slumming. Or maybe she was just scared—of PI's like me.

The motel was the typical sort of trysting place. The island was full of them. A tourist looking for a good hotel outside of San Juan might have a problem, but a native looking for a place to bring his girl friend could find something like the Presidente within spitting distance. Carlos had probably picked it out. Maybe he was the one who was scared.

I parked outside the drive and walked up, off the road, hoping there weren't any dogs around.

It was a two-story concrete building, fairly new, built in the shape of a U. The rooms opened off an inside hallway. There were exits at both ends of the U and one in the middle, where the office was. Only three other cars were parked outside.

I looked through the open office window from the sidewalk. El Presidente didn't bother to play games: a dumpy-looking woman at the desk just collected their money—Mrs. Lyons paid—and gave them a key for Room 8. She indicated that it was on the first floor toward the left side of the U. They went off down the hall—Hernandez with his arm around



her shoulders, she leaning against him like a girl who'd just been awarded Robert Redford for dinner—and I went back to the parking lot. It was a pleasant, cool night. I felt like a cigarette but was afraid to light one in case someone might see it. There's a lot of burglary in Puerto Rico and a lot of unlicensed guns; people are likely to shoot first and cry later.

The lights went on in a room to my left. It had two windows, both draped behind the open louvers. I played a few interesting airs with my tongue against my front teeth.

Half an hour later, the light was still on. I should mention here that I draw the line at door-crashing and photography in these cases. If my word isn't good enough for a client he'll have to find himself another PI. Lyons had agreed to go along with this. If legal proof was needed I would bring along another witness. Lyons had said that wasn't necessary, so presumably I already had enough proof of the sort he wanted and I would have left if just then I hadn't heard what sounded like a quarrel coming from the direction of Room 8. I could hear both their voices but couldn't make out the words. Then I heard the first shot, followed almost immediately by the second, and I started across the parking lot about as fast as a heavy-smoking forty-year-old could.

I angled for the door on the left side of the U. If someone was coming out, I figured that's where he or she would exit. The door was unlocked and I ran down the tiled hall toward the two or three people who had already gathered outside the door of Room 8. There was some excited talking, but no one had tried to open the door. I wasn't sure I wanted to and wished I had my gun. The dumpy woman from the desk was waddling down the hall like a wind-up toy gone loco. I tried the doorknob gingerly; it was locked.

"*Tienen ustedes un revolver?* Do you have a gun?" I called to the woman from the desk.

"*Si, en la oficina!*"

"Get it!" I yelled.

She turned quickly back to the office without questioning who I was. They're used to cops giving orders in a place like that so why not me?

It was quiet inside the room now. I kept people back from the door until I saw the desk woman returning with a man at her side carrying a revolver. At the same moment I heard a car motor start outside. I ran back down the hall to the door just in time to see the lights of the red Cutlass swerving down the dark drive. It was too late to catch it.

Back at Room 8, I told the dumpy woman it was safe to unlock the door now. Again she obeyed me as if I had some right to be giving orders. When the door swung back nobody went in. I was given the honor.

Mrs. Lyons was lying in a grotesque sprawl on the cheap plush rug. She was wearing a half-slip and panties and nothing more. There was blood on her face and upper abdomen, and I didn't have to look all that closely to realize she was dead.

"Where's the telephone?" I asked the desk woman.

She pointed in the direction of the office. I found one in the hall just outside the office and dialed Homicide.

I've had some dealings with Homicide over the years and I can't say I have the greatest respect for them. But I do have one good friend there, Roberto Burgos, who is also a very good cop. I asked for him, and by pure luck he was in. I told him the situation at El Presidente and he said they'd be right over and would put out an alert on the Cutlass. I lit a much-needed cigarette and went back down the hall.

Hernandez hadn't left by the window. He couldn't have fit through the louvers. He wouldn't have left through the office entrance, and I hadn't seen him come out the side. He must have run up the stairs by the side door and then, when everyone was gathered outside Room 8, sneaked back down the stairs and out the side door.

The first cop car pulled in with its sound-and-light show in about six minutes. Roberto wasn't in it—he had to drive down from headquarters and that would take a while. An ambulance arrived a few minutes later, and by the time Roberto and the professionals did show up the scene at Motel El Presidente looked like something from a cheap TV movie.

He shook my hand but he didn't smile. In fact, his brown, moustachioed face looked pretty unhappy as he gazed down at the body.

"Hernandez shouldn't get far in that car," I said.

"If I were him I'd already be out of that car," Roberto said.

He examined the body and then the rest of the gaudy two-by-four room while the others started working with their cameras and chalk. Hernandez had left nothing in the room.

"It's an easy one for you," I said, "but a bitch for me. I'm working for her husband."

"Give me a cigarette," Roberto said.

He banged the cigarette against his hard hand and waited for me to give him a light. I lit it and one for myself.

"So it's simple," he said. "Let's go get some coffee and you give me all the details."

He left orders about the removal of the body, and we went out to his car and pulled away from the circus.

It didn't turn out to be so simple. The cops found the Cutlass three hours later, parked in Rio Piedras. There was no sign of Carlos Hernandez. Roberto had already put people at the airport to make sure he didn't leave the island. Puerto Rico is about a hundred miles long by thirty-five wide. Roberto figured that if he kept Hernandez on the island he'd have to turn him up eventually. I figured the same.

There was no record. There was nothing to work with except the information I already had and what little more we got from Lyons later that night when we broke the news to him. He took it well enough to show me that his love for his wife had not been idyllic. Roberto asked him for the photo of Hernandez.

When I hit the pillow about three o'clock they hadn't turned up Hernandez. When I woke at ten I called Roberto's office, but there was nothing new. There were sixteen Carlos Hernandezes on the island and they were checking them all out.

"The gun was a .38," he said. "Not that that helps a whole lot."

"Check out the casinos and the track," I said. "Lyons says he has gambling connections."

"I'm sure his gambling friends will be very helpful," Roberto said bitterly. "Everyone here just loves to cooperate with the police."

"You need a new image," I offered.

"What we need is a few more people with brains and a few less with muscle."

"The boys who give out the parking tickets are pretty efficient," I offered.

He hung up.

I made myself some coffee and an egg and took a shower. Then I drove out to Lyons' house. The place had obviously not been designed by a gimcrack architect. It was very modern, low-slung, and spacious, with a beautiful view out over the valley. A short steep drive led up to the entrance. There were two newly planted royal palms in front and a third standing by, waiting to go in the ground. Lyons answered the door himself.

"I gave the servants the day off."

"Better get that palm tree planted," I said absurdly.

He shrugged and led me into the living room, the kind of living room I might like to have myself if I ever get rich. (There's always the lottery.)

"Want a drink?" he asked.

I shook my head.

He went to a walnut liquor cabinet and poured himself a stiff Scotch and soda.

"I came mainly to bring you up to date on the police investigation," I said. "Somehow I feel responsible since I was working on the case for you when it happened."

"No need," he said. "I didn't hire you to protect Vera, just to follow her."

"You can forget about my fee," I said.

"No," he said. "That wouldn't be right. I'll send you a check for three days and gasoline."

"As you like," I said.

I told him what the police were doing and how little progress they were making. Hernandez probably couldn't get off the island but it might take some time to track him down. I promised to keep in touch.

"I'd appreciate it," Lyons said.

"Why do you suppose he shot her?" I asked, too bluntly.

He took a swallow from his glass. "Lovers' quarrel, I suppose. I told you he probably carried a gun."

At that moment a young woman walked into the living room and I felt my pulsebeat speed up. Mrs. Lyons had been attractive, but this one was a knockout: perhaps thirty, about five feet five, darkish hair, pale skin, and the sexiest grey eyes I'd ever seen.

"I thought I heard voices," she said.

Lyons introduced his younger sister, May.

She held out her hand and I took it willingly. "I've never met a private detective before," she said.

I wondered how much she knew about her brother's hiring me.

"I was just about to leave," I said.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Are you sure you won't have a drink?" Lyons said to me.

I declined again. He went to refill his own glass.

May Lyons studied me unashamedly. She reminded me of a polished

stone that had been tumbled in rough seas until it shone like glass. A woman who looked at you like that had seen some tumbling.

"Well, I'll keep in touch," I said to Lyons.

"Yes," he said.

"I'll see you out," his sister said.

She led the way into the hall. At the front door she smiled at me—I thought invitingly.

"You live with your brother?" I asked.

"Yes, since my divorce. About a year now." She pulled the door closed behind us and lowered her voice. "Are you investigating Vera's death?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, if you are you may have your hands full."

"How's that?"

"Harry's an idiot. He doesn't see anything. Vera did her share of running around."

"You're pretty direct," I said.

"I didn't like Vera much," she said. "She didn't like me either. And she couldn't stay away from the tables. Eventually Harry refused to pay her debts, so she depended on other people—some of them pretty influential in the wrong circles."

"You seem to know a lot," I said. "Perhaps you should know that the police are quite certain who murdered your sister-in-law. It's just a question of finding him."

"Oh," she said.

I put my hand on her soft white arm. "You look very attractive in black," I said.

I could feel her eyes on me all the way down the walk.

The Homicide boys were pulling out their hair. They'd checked all sixteen Carlos Hernandezes and all sixteen were dead ends. Circulation of the photo didn't help. Checking with the States was negative. We were beginning to wonder if Carlos Hernandez was his real name.

"Nobody can disappear for long on an island this size," Roberto said.

"If he's still on the island," I offered.

"He's still on the island."

"Did you check the gambling connection?"

"Yeah. Just what I thought—nobody's ever seen him, nobody's ever heard of him."

"Offer a deal."

"I already have. No dice."

"Well, let me know if I can be of any help," I said pleasantly.

"You might try not sounding so damned breezy all the time," he said.

I was keeping in touch with Lyons as I had promised. It was exactly a week since his wife's death when I got an idea. I went out to see him at dinnertime. The third palm had been planted. The three of them looked very good. I've always like royal palms.

May Lyons was at home. Lyons asked her if we could be alone. She said "Certainly" and closed the door behind her.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"The police aren't getting anywhere. Hernandez seems to have vanished. What we need is more information about him than you've provided. Now, from my experience with women there's always someone they confide in, someone they'll tell almost anything to."

Lyons thought. "Vera did have one really close friend."

"Who?" I asked, taking out my pad.

He gave me the address of a woman who lived in the Condado, the wife of another American businessman. Her name was Ellen Chase.

The Chases lived at the very top of a high-rise condominium on the eastern edge of the Condado. It was far enough on the edge to escape most of the unpleasant features of San Juan's beach strip. I called first to make sure Mrs. Chase would be home, then drove over. I had to hold up all sorts of identification to the peephole before she'd open the door. She ushered me through the living room onto a wide carpeted terrace that overlooked Ocean Park and the sea. I accepted her offer of a drink.

"My husband's in St. Thomas on a business trip," she said. She was about Mrs. Lyons' age and average-looking, with blonde hair and some freckles. The plain dress she wore covered a somewhat plump but still passable figure. "You were a bit vague on the phone. What exactly do you want to know?"

"Whatever you can tell me about Carlos Hernandez."

"I don't understand," she said. "Why should I—?"

"Because you were Mrs. Lyons' best friend. The police can't find Hernandez. They don't have enough information. I thought you might provide some more—if you're interested in apprehending her murderer."

"Of course I'm interested," she said. I had upset her. It looked like she might even start crying on me.

"It's all so *sordid*," she said. "To die like that."

"Here," I said, holding her drink out to her.

"Thank you. You seem very nice."

She seemed the wrong sort to be Vera Lyons' best friend. But that's the way it sometimes works. Maybe Ellen Chase was the kind of woman who enjoys a taste of evil vicariously, without any danger of soiling her own hands. Perhaps Vera's confidences had provided some guilty excitement in her humdrum life.

"I'll tell you what I can. Vera hadn't been seeing him very long, a few weeks at most. They would meet somewhere and usually wind up at a motel. He was very handsome and he dressed nicely, but I don't think he had much money."

"Do you know anything about his gambling connections?"

"Not really. We didn't talk about that. I don't even know what he did for a living."

"Where was he from?"

"I thought he was from San Juan."

"Did they have any fights that you know of?"

"Yes, a couple. He was hot-tempered. Vera liked him that way."

"Did you know he carried a gun?"

"Yes. Vera told me. She thought it was exciting."

"What about Mrs. Lyons' gambling debts? Did she ever borrow from you?"

"No, she always seemed to find the money. She said she knew people." I had run out of questions.

"I wish I could be more helpful," she said. She sounded genuinely sorry. "Would you like another drink?"

"Thank you," I said.

She disappeared through the wide glass doors to get it.

"You've got a marvelous view," I called.

"Yes, isn't it? It costs us a bit but it's worth it. Do you live nearby?"

"No, in Rio Piedras. But my office is in the Condado—down off Ashford."

"It's noisy there," she said, returning with refills for us both.

"I used to have my office in Hato Rey," I continued, "but I decided to move to where the action is. In Hato Rey it was car horns and sandwich shops; in the Condado it's car horns, sandwich shops, tourists, third-rate racketeers, and gays. You can see how I've moved up in the world."

She smiled. "How does one become a private detective?"

"I think you have to be a little loony," I said. "I was an English major in college. I was assigned to Criminal Investigations in the Army."

"You don't seem the least bit loony to me," Ellen Chase said. She sounded almost coquettish.

"I'd better be going," I said.

"You haven't finished your drink."

I finished it. She accompanied me to the door. I heard her rattling a lot of bolts and chains after I was out in the hall.

I didn't get much sleep that night. My mind was working overtime, and in that strange state just on the verge of sleep stray bits and pieces slowly floated into place. Some of them resisted and I had to give them a nudge. Sometimes another piece which I'd all but forgotten would do the nudging for me. By morning, feeling a little bleary-minded, I decided that they all fit well enough to take the risk. I called Roberto Burgos at Homicide. He wasn't there. They expected him back about noon. I left a message that he should call my office. Then I dressed and drove down to the Condado.

It's not a bad office—two rooms fairly well furnished and an air conditioner that usually works. I have a part-time secretary and a part-time assistant. The secretary works mornings. She's a plain girl in her late twenties named Maria. My theory is that really good-looking secretaries are usually bad secretaries. Maria is very efficient. My assistant, Raul, works only when I call him in on a case. I let him run the routine leads.

Maria was behind her desk. She had a list of phone calls for me. I answered some and forgot about the others. Then I went downstairs for coffee and a doughnut. Roberto's call finally came at eleven-thirty.

"I think I may have Hernandez," I told him.

"Where? At your office?"

"No. How long will it take you to get down here?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"Bring somebody with you. Make sure he's armed. I'll be waiting downstairs."

"*Esta bien*," Roberto said.

They pulled up in less than fifteen minutes and I jumped into the back seat. I knew the other plainclothesman—he wasn't very bright, but sufficiently burly. He drove.



"Where to?" Roberto said.

"Swing around. It's not far."

"Are you wearing your gun?" he asked.

"Yes. But I don't expect we'll run into much trouble."

"That's nice."

A few minutes later we parked in front of the tall building where Lyons had his office. Roberto looked at me quizzically as I led the way to the elevator.

Lyons was just leaving for lunch, but when I told him I thought we'd found Hernandez he motioned us into his office. There were plenty of chairs to go around.

"Well?" he said. "Where is he?"

"We'll get to that," I said.

"I don't understand."

"Aren't you interested in how we located him?"

"Of course."

"Well, let me fill you in," I said. "For starters—here was a man of whom we had a photo. He was supposed to have gambling connections. He probably should have had a police record but didn't, he carried a gun, he was supposedly from the island but couldn't get off the island, and yet he managed to disappear completely. That was all possible, but damned difficult. Captain Burgos here is pretty efficient and if I may brag a little so am I. Yet neither one of us could turn up a single lead on his whereabouts."

"Until now," Lyons corrected me.

"Yes, until now. So eventually I got to thinking—what if Hernandez hadn't just dropped from sight? What if he was dead? It would explain the disappearing act. But why should he be dead? Somebody killed him. Reason? To keep him quiet.

"Who would want to keep him quiet? The person who had hired him to kill your wife."

"This sounds like the wildest sort of conjecture to me," Lyons said.

"By itself, it is. But there's more. For example, when you have a murder the first thing you want is a nice clear motive. Where was Hernandez's motive? A lovers' quarrel was about the best we could do. I had heard voices at the hotel that could have indicated a quarrel, but they could also have been the sort of shouting that goes on just before someone gets shot.

"And Captain Burgos' conjecture that Hernandez was a false name seemed likely—but why would a man invent a false name just to take out a woman, even a married woman? I didn't see a sufficient reason—unless he was planning to kill her from the start.

"Then there was your photo of Hernandez. I was surprised you had one. When I asked you where you'd got it you wouldn't tell me."

"I'm afraid—" Lyons started to interrupt. I cut him off.

"That day you inquired rather pointedly whether I carried a gun. Why should I need a gun just to follow your wife around? Why should you ask? Of course, now I can see why. If I carried a gun there was a danger of Hernandez being wounded at the hotel. In which case he might talk—in fact, I think we can be sure he would."

"This is insulting," Lyons said angrily. "I'll be damned if I'm going to—"

"Sit down," Roberto told him coldly.

But Lyons was fuming. "Why in hell would I hire you to follow my wife if I had arranged her murder? I suppose I wanted her killer to be caught so he could tell you all about me."

"It was unlikely he'd be caught if he had a gun and I didn't. The reason for your hiring me is obvious. I was your alibi. It was just about a perfect plan. Hernandez would do the shooting, I would be a witness, then you would kill Hernandez and there'd be nothing to worry about. The poor slob was already dead the day he met you."

"By the time I'm through with you, you'll wish *you'd* never been born," Lyons said. "And that goes for your two friends as well."

"Oh, I'm perfectly aware I haven't an iota of real proof," I said. "Proof would be something like finding Hernandez's body—with a bullet in it from a gun owned by you."

"And I suppose you're prepared to do that," Lyons said sarcastically.

"As a matter of fact, I am. I'm afraid you'll have to take a drive with us, Mr. Lyons." I looked to Roberto for his acquiescence. He nodded moodily. He was probably thinking what it would be like being back in uniform handing out parking tickets.

It took us a quarter of an hour to dig up the third palm tree in front of Lyons' house. The body was under it, all right—in a rather ugly state of decomposition. There were two bullets in the upper back. Lyons fell apart after that. He voluntarily produced the gun, a .32 automatic fitted

with a silencer. Later on at headquarters he gave us the rest of the story.

"I hated her. God, how I hated her. She was one of those women who had a genius for making you feel rotten. You would come down to breakfast after a good sleep feeling fine, and in just a few words she'd give you an acid stomach for the rest of the day. She wanted out of the marriage just as much as I did, but she was determined to take as much of my money with her as she could. She didn't care about courts, lawyers, or scandal—only the money. I'd worked hard to get what I had. So I hired Gonzalez. His name was Felix Gonzalez, a cheap woman chaser and small-time gambler who'd do almost anything for twenty thousand dollars.

"I agreed to pay him half beforehand and the rest the day after. Well, he came around as we'd agreed the afternoon following her death. I'd told him I would get him off the island by private plane. The servants had been given the day off, and May was out—I'd arranged that. The palm tree was waiting out on the front lawn. I planted the tree that afternoon."

The tree had been doing very well before we interfered and dug it up.



Clara often talked with her friends in television . . .

# FAITHFUL VIEWER



by **MIEL TANBURN**

Clara Push was delighted. She often talked to her friends in television but it was an unexpected pleasure when they began talking back. First was poor, confused young Victoria Revelstroke in *Livable Marriage*.

"Don't you see you're just trying to punish your mother?" Clara counseled the actress. "You should give the baby up for adoption."

Surprised, the girl peered out from Clara's twenty-one-inch color screen. "You might have a point, lady," she said.

"It's good advice," Clara assured her.

"I'll take it," Victoria decided. When she turned back to her mother, Victoria's smile was so selfless and brave that Clara Push applauded right there in her own living room. The girl was quite an actress. But had she really spoken out that way to Clara Push? It certainly seemed so. And when similar instances followed, it became obvious to Clara that her friends in television were indeed bringing their problems directly to her. But with the problem faced by Aroma Coquille of *Forever Summer*, Clara's involvement entered a new dimension.

Aroma looked out from the TV screen and said, "I'm in a fix. Can we talk for a sec?"

"By all means," Clara said, pulling her chair closer.

"Not here," the actress said. "Too many ears." And Aroma Coquille climbed out of the television set. Clara thought the actress exposed too much thigh, but perhaps there was no graceful way to make an exit from a picture tube.

"Nice place," Aroma Coquille said, smoothing her dress and looking around the living room. "Lived here long?"

"Forty-two years," Clara answered proudly.

The actress laughed.

"You must have a good real-estate agent," she said. "For L.A. that's a record."

Clara could overlook Aroma Coquille's flippancy. She understood that Hollywood people often developed a protective veneer to mask their sensitive natures.

"The word's out that you're worth listening to," the actress said.

"I try to be helpful." Clara looked expectantly at her visitor. "You said you have a problem?"

"I've seen some scripts," Aroma Coquille said. "*Summer's* going to clobber me in a car wreck and put me in the hospital."

"Summer?" Clara asked.

"*Forever Summer*—that soap you were watching. They're dropping my character—but first I have to linger for a month in intensive care. Meanwhile, though, I've got a chance in a musical—except rehearsals start next week. So timing's the problem."

"I see," Clara said.

"Yeah. Say, what's in this Miss Lonelyhearts routine for you?" Aroma Coquille asked. "Is there a catch?"

"Goodness, no," Clara answered. "I was Henry's nurse for many, many years. Helping people in difficulty is my profession. Isn't that what you call type-casting?" Clara smiled at the aptness of the phrase. "Henry was my husband, Dr. Push," she added in explanation. "General practice. He passed to his reward last year."

"The curtain drops but you stay in character, huh?"

Clara's eyes misted in memory for a moment, but then she brightened. "At first I was terribly depressed, but thank heaven for television. It's my constant companion, and it's brought me so many interesting new friends. I'm sure that without them I would have been beside myself after Henry's passing. But you don't want to hear about me. Is there some way I can help you, my dear?"

The actress shrugged. "Like I said, I've got a chance for a song-and-dance part that would give the old career a helluva boost. But I can't just walk out on the soap. What I need is a kosher way to exit in a hurry. Any suggestions?"

Clara pursed her lips in thought. "The character you play in the serial is rather-detestable. Isn't she?"

"You said it." Aroma Coquille laughed. "In your day Gretchen would have been called a witch. Today we spell it a bit differently. Why?"

"Since she's going to perish anyway—in an automobile accident, you said?—wouldn't it suit the purpose equally well if Gretchen were sent to her reward more directly?"

"How do you mean?"

"Wait here a moment, dear," Clara said. "I believe I do have a solution for you."

She returned to the living room shortly with a pleased look on her face. "These were among Henry's medicines. They're just the thing."

"What are they?"

"Sleeping pills," Clara said. "Administer all twenty of them to Gretchen before she retires tonight. It should solve your problem."

Aroma Coquille glanced toward the bedroom. "You keep a drugstore back there?"

"I brought Henry's office supplies home with me, of course," Clara said.

The actress looked at the vial. "I take twenty of these tonight?"

"You'll find that quite sufficient," Clara said.

Before climbing back into the TV set the actress told Clara, "People

in show business stick together, hon. Remember that. If you ever need a favor—”

“Nonsense,” Clara interrupted. “I’m just flattered you’ve let me help.”

“That’s sweet,” Aroma said. “But the offer’s good. Keep it in mind.”

The next afternoon Clara watched what appeared to be a hurriedly rewritten script of *Forever Summer*. The actors let it be known that the difficult Gretchen, who was to have departed that day on a motor trip, had died of an overdose instead. And a short item in the next morning’s newspaper stated that Aroma Coquille, the dramatic actress and former model, had been signed as co-star in a musical comedy that was about to enter rehearsals. Clara nodded happily at the news article, pleased to have been able to help another of her friends in television.

It was several days later that the cosmetics salesgirl broke into tears on Clara’s davenport. She was a slim, attractive young thing with an alabaster complexion and fluffy red hair, rather like cotton candy.

“Please forgive me,” the girl sobbed, foraging in her purse for a handkerchief, “but I’ve got terrible problems. I want to die.”

“Don’t you worry,” Clara comforted, putting an arm around her. “Just have yourself a good cry.”

Clara wasn’t surprised. Even at the front door the girl, who said her name was Lynda DuBarry, had seemed forlorn. After a moment’s chat on the front porch, Clara had invited her inside where she began a sales talk for her line of cosmetics. Clara thought that Lynda DuBarry, despite her tears, was pretty as a picture. She placed a box of facial tissues in the girl’s lap and said, “Tell nurse all about it now.”

As her sobbing subsided, Lynda DuBarry told Clara her story. She’d come to Hollywood eight months earlier as Miss Hinton County, hoping for a career in the movies. She’d knocked on a thousand doors, worn out her wardrobe, gone through her savings, and was no closer to appearing on the silver screen than she’d been a year earlier when her name had been Francine Gurnsey and she’d sold popcorn back home at the Bijou on Friday nights.

“I finally had to take this awful job,” she told Clara, “because I’m so far behind in my rent. And that’s not all. They repossessed my car and my stereo, and I think I’m pregnant. I wish I was dead!”

Clara said encouragingly, “Lift your spirits, dear. I’ve helped many girls in show business.”

"Show business?" the girl wailed. "I'm selling cosmetics!"

"The important thing is to get rid of the old character," Clara explained. "Don't you see? That's crucial. It worked for Aroma Coquille and it will work for Lynda DuBarry. When you're bogged down in a bad role, you must change the script. Wait here a moment."

Clara left the room and when she came back she gave Lynda DuBarry a bottle of pills. "Take these before retiring tonight," she said.

"What are they?"

"The answer to your problems, dear. The end of your role as the unhappy door-to-door salesgirl. They're sleeping pills."

Lynda examined the pill bottle. "Downers? There's enough here to kill a horse!" She looked at Clara and asked, "Where's a glass of water?"

"Not here," Clara said, her eyes twinkling. "The proper place to take these is on the set, in your bedroom. Then tomorrow a new chapter will begin—in the drama of Lynda DuBarry!"

The girl threw the pill bottle in her purse and quickly gathered up her notebook and sample case. "I'm getting out of here before you change your mind," she said. "I don't know what your game is, lady—but thanks!"

"You're entirely welcome," Clara beamed, and as the girl hurried out the door she called after her, "Break a leg!"

That had been Wednesday. It was Friday when the police sergeant called. He was a tall, weary-looking man who entered the living room after showing Clara his identification.

Clara looked him over critically. "I would think," she suggested, "that some sartorial quirk would help the viewer identify with your character more readily. A fedora hat, say, or a rumpled raincoat."

"Or an unrumpled one even," the sergeant said, "especially if it was raining. Do you know a Francine Gurnsey?"

"That's an unappealing name," Clara said. "It sounds bovine."

"Yeah. Well, the landlord didn't think she was very appealing when he found the body. This Gurnsey O.D.'d Wednesday night. No note. But your name was the last one in her order book—"

"If you'll forgive me, Sergeant," Clara interrupted, "that's an uninspired reading. You'll never get a series that way. Let me make a suggestion." She brought a hand to her throat and exclaimed, "Lynda DuBarry dead? Why, that's impossible! The girl had everything to live for!"



“—and it was your late husband’s name on the pill bottle,” the sergeant said. “You being a registered nurse and all, I thought I better talk to you.”

Clara whirled, pointing her finger at an imaginary third person in the room. “And only *you*,” she said, “had the motive and the opportunity—and it was *your* thumbprint on the murder weapon! Try it something like that, Sergeant.”

“Yeah, well, I’m sure murder’s stretching it,” the sergeant said. “But in case there’s a problem here I better give you your rights.”

Clara frowned at him. “You’re not trying at all. I’m tempted to change channels on you.”

“You don’t have to say anything,” the sergeant told her flatly. “You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to have an attorney present—”

“Very well, then,” Clara said. “You may leave, Sergeant. I can’t help you if you won’t cooperate.”

“Why don’t you get your coat, Mrs. Push, and we’ll go downtown? O.K.?”

“I can’t possibly,” Clara said. “My friends are expecting me for the afternoon.”

“I wasn’t actually asking,” the sergeant said. “It’s more like you have to.”

Clara looked at her watch. “In fact, I’m already late joining them,” she said anxiously. “I’m sorry, Sergeant, but you’ve come at a very bad time. You’ll have to leave.” She opened her front door.

“See, we’re practically outside already,” he said. “That’s easy. Where would your coat be? In that back room there?”

Oh, the bother! Clara hurriedly followed him to the bedroom and while he opened her closet door she found what she needed among her late husband’s medical supplies. She wasn’t exceptionally strong but Dr. Push’s scalpel was exceptionally sharp. And the sergeant’s carotid artery offered exceptionally little resistance.

“Goodness,” Clara said. The man had made quite a mess. Well, she’d have to clean up later. What if one of her friends had already missed her?

Clara Push quickly turned on her television set. But just as it warmed up her doorbell rang again. Bother! This time a uniformed policeman stood on the porch. “Any trouble in there? Sarge?”

"I'm busy, Officer," Clara said, trying to close the door. "You'll have to return later."

He looked at her. "Yeah? You wait right here, lady." He forced his way inside, took in the living room at a glance, and ran into the hallway.

Clara raised her arm to stop him and saw that her hand was red—quite red. And dripping. "Dear me," she said.

At the same moment she heard an exclamation from the officer in the bedroom.

Moving quickly, Clara Push discovered that her assumption about Aroma Coquille had been accurate. A picture tube doesn't allow one to enter it gracefully.

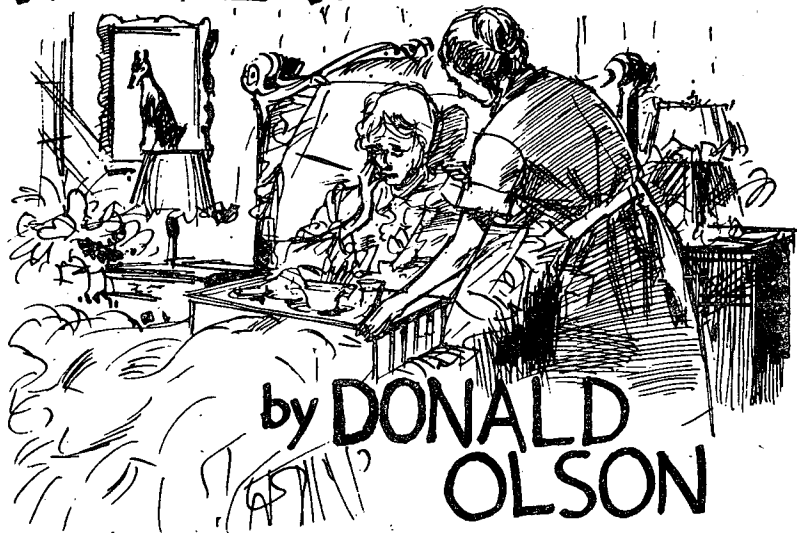
The officer stormed into the empty living room with his revolver drawn. For a fraction of a second he imagined he saw something crazy out of the corner of his eye—a small bloody hand reaching out from the television set and turning it off. But his attention was on the front door, not on the television set, and he ran outside in pursuit of Clara Push. He had no luck, though, and in a few minutes he called downtown from the radio in his car and had them put out an APB.

But Clara Push was never located by the police. In fact, she was never seen in Los Angeles again, except by faithful viewers who occasionally see someone of her description now and again on a late movie—in a bit part, usually playing a nurse or some other kindly person.



*The young man digging the grave was an ex-convict . . .*

# THE LAST TIME



by DONALD  
OLSON

**A** flood of tallowy August sunshine poured across the bed and the carpet as Myrtle pulled open the curtains and uttered in her cheerful birdsong voice a good morning that tried to sound natural. She performed the ritual of the breakfast tray with an air of everyday efficiency, trying to make them both forget that this was the last time she would ever do it. But then Elnora spoiled the act by reaching for the housekeeper's hand and giving it a quick, desperate squeeze.

THE LAST TIME

65

"Dear Myrtle. I can't bear to think about it. The last time, after all these years."

"Oh, now, love, you ought to be rejoicing. Just think—from now on the Judge himself will do the honors. Think how pleasant that will be. I only wish my Alfie had lived to see his retirement day—all the plans we had. His brother Will had a place all picked out for us near them in California. You just never know."

Elnora listlessly stirred her coffee. "What will you do now?"

"I just might up and go to California. No reason why I can't, thanks to the Judge's generosity."

Elnora's voice betrayed desperation. "But *I* don't want to travel. I don't want things to change. I'm afraid of change." Dolefully, her shadow-circled violet eyes looked up at the older woman with the plaintive appeal of a child's. "Oh, *why* did he have to do it? It was cruel—cruel."

"Now, love, maybe it was the kindest thing to do under the circumstances. Wouldn't you rather think of the poor creature in doggy heaven than stuck in some strange kennel or living on in pain?"

"But I *loved* Buzzy. And he wasn't sick—just a little stiff in his joints. He was all I had. Leo's away for weeks at a time with all those speaking engagements. Oh, there's been you, dear Myrtle—but I only saw you for a few hours in the morning three days a week. I depended on Buzzy."

She turned her face to the wall and gazed tearfully at the portrait of the Doberman she herself had painted.

"Land sakes, love, you couldn't take him with you on the cruise."

"So the Judge passed sentence, and Buzzy's dead."

"Well, at least the Judge did it himself. The poor creature didn't know a thing but that he was going for another ramble in the woods."

A look of pain crossed Elnora's thin, once-beautiful face. "I heard the shot. I felt as if the bullet had lodged in my heart. I can feel it still, like a hard lump. I'll always feel it."

From the window, Myrtle said, "He's already here, by the way."

"That man?"

"Surprised his rattly old truck didn't wake you."

Presently, Elnora rose and bathed and dressed. Only then did she venture a glance out the window. In the rose garden across the lawn a burly young man, stripped to the waist and with a red bandanna tied around his head, had already cleared away some of the bushes and was

preparing to dig the grave. The sight of the fellow's glistening, hairy shoulders repelled Elnora, as did the purpose of his labor. She wondered if Leo might have been right in trying to dissuade her from having Buzzy buried within view of her window where his grave would constantly remind her of her loss.

Myrtle was rummaging in the closet, chattering on about which garments should be packed and which left behind.

"It's only a cruise, dear," said Elnora.

"Well—maybe I'm letting the cat out of the bag, but the Judge told me to pack both warm and cool things. Like maybe the cruise might be extended if it agrees with you."

If it agreed with *him*, Elnora thought. He was the one who always made the decisions. About everything, even her friends. Until finally she had none left.

"I wonder if *she's* to be pensioned off too," she said aloud.

"*She?*"

"The ever-gracious, always-efficient Miss Jimerson." When Elnora had asked Leo he'd been evasive, murmuring something about Faye Jimerson helping him with his memoirs. The idea had depressed Elnora, the thought of lying in her room and hearing the tinkle-bell laughter of Miss Jimerson floating up from the study. I suppose I'll never really know the truth, she thought. The one time she'd ever voiced her suspicions Leo had dismissed them with an indulgent laugh. That was two years ago, shortly after she'd recovered from her breakdown, when she'd ventured out alone one day to the Yacht Club for lunch and had run into Leo and his secretary.

"What a surprise, Judge," Faye Jimerson had simpered. "Why didn't you tell me your wife was joining us?"

Leo had merely smiled, quite unperturbed. "It's a surprise to me too."

"How nice. I seem to have surprised you both," Elnora had said, outsmiling them both.

Was it as innocent as they'd made it appear? The eminent jurist lunching with his secretary. Why not? Only a judge was not always a jurist, no matter what the press might call him—and a secretary was not always just a secretary. Especially a pretty one like Miss Jimerson.

Not that Elnora had lost any sleep over her suspicions. By then she was content to drift through the days in her own secluded world of Honeycomb Farm, miles from the city and any neighbors. She drank a

little—well, perhaps more than a little. She tended her roses. She painted. And she had Buzzy.

Now Buzzy was dead and Myrtle was pensioned off. She thought of the plans Leo had made for them—always together. Seeing only *his* friends, doing what *he* wanted, traveling to places *he* wanted to see. At the window, she said, "I wonder if Leo is paying him by the hour. He keeps looking at his watch. And he certainly isn't breaking his back to get it done."

At mid-morning Elnora, fortified with a Bloody Mary, drifted out to the garden. The man glanced up for a moment and said nothing.

"It's taking you a long time," she observed mildly.

At this he stood erect, facing her, the hair on his deep chest matted wetly like grass after a rainstorm, and scowled at her.

"Filthy hot work, lady."

He'd marked off the site and removed about six inches of dirt.

"Aren't you making it too big?" she said. "Did you look at the box in the shed?"

"Gotta dig out a space bigger'n the box." His insolent, gruff voice didn't conceal his contempt for her interference.

The heat and liquor created a pleasant fog in her brain, dulling momentarily her grief at Buzzy's loss. "Won't you need help lifting the box?"

With a swagger, he flexed his massive biceps so that his chest muscles expanded impressively. "Lady, I can dead lift two hundred pounds without half tryin'."

Dead lift. The phrase brought to her mind the couple of times she'd held Buzzy in her arms. She recalled the terrible day he'd broken his leg and she'd borne him, impossible as it seemed, in her frail arms all the way from the meadow to the house. Buzzy had licked her hand and regarded her with his great, gentle eyes. Now she took a quick swallow of her drink and blinked back the tears.

"That's how I got in shape," the man boasted. "Liftin' weights up there."

"Up there?"

"Prison." He said it braggingly, as if to enjoy her startled reaction. Elnora was glad Myrtle was in the house. So long as Buzzy was nearby she'd never been afraid of being alone. Buzzy would never have let anyone harm her.

"What's your name?" she asked him—not that she cared, but there was some elusive quality about his face that seemed remotely familiar, as if she might once have seen his picture in a newspaper.

"Luther."

"Have you worked for my husband before, Mr. Luther?"

"Jimerson—Luther Jimerson." His glance was covertly amused.

So that explained the resemblance. "You're related to my husband's secretary?"

"Faye's my sister."

Then she remembered. Some five years ago, when Leo was still a practicing lawyer, Faye Jimerson had consulted him about an appeal of her brother's robbery conviction. Leo had pulled strings and subsequently Faye had come to work for him.

Answering her previous question, Luther said, "Yes, I've done other little jobs for the Judge. I owe him."

"And your sister? I suppose she'll be looking for another job now that my husband's retiring from the bench?"

Luther's expression betrayed a subtle mockery. "I wouldn't know, lady."

He turned his back to her and resumed digging. Elnora wandered back into the house where Myrtle was still packing.

"Imagine that. He's Faye Jimerson's brother."

Myrtle crossed to the window and took another look. "Beauty and the beast."

"He's an ex-con."

"That I can believe." And then, looking at the clock on the mantel, "Don't suppose his honor'll be home for lunch."

"He never is."

"I thought maybe today, bein' special-like. . ."

"He might come home for the interment? You should know better. Leo never liked Buzzy. I think he was rather afraid of him."

A morbid curiosity drew her back to the window. "Myrtle, what do you think? Isn't he making an awfully big hole out there?"

Myrtle agreed that he was. "But then Buzzy was a big dog. And in the box . . . Come away from the window, love. It'll only depress you, watching."

Before she turned away, Elnora saw Luther pause, lean on his shovel, and once more glance at his watch. It was nearly noon. Myrtle said she

would stay on till one to make sure everything was shipshape. "Am I expected to feed that brute?"

"At the rate he's going he certainly won't be done by lunchtime. I'll find out."

She went down and asked him if he'd brought his lunch or if she should ask Myrtle to fix him something.

He glanced toward the house with an annoyed frown. "Won't she be goin' soon?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Thought the Judge said she left at noon."

"She'll be leaving as soon as her work is done. Do you want something to eat or don't you?"

"I'm workin' up quite an appetite. If it ain't no bother."

Myrtle made extra sandwiches and brought them out to the table on the lawn along with a pitcher of iced tea. Inside the house, Elnora insisted that Myrtle sit down and eat with her.

"It'll be the last time. Oh, Myrtle, I *shall* miss you."

"Same here, love. You always made me feel more like a friend than an employee."

"You are my friend. About the only one I've got left." Leo had judged all her earlier friends, found them wanting, and sentenced them to oblivion. Misfits, all of them, he'd declared. Wishy-washy artist types. Well, maybe they were, but they'd been her kind of people: sensitive, caring. She remembered the blasting effect Leo's presence had had upon them, the way they withered into speechlessness under his politely mocking scrutiny.

Elnora lay down on her bed while Myrtle finished her work downstairs. She tried to construct an image of the future, but none came. She had always known she was more a creature of impulse than of motive, and knew she must have faith in the validity of her impulses, find strength in her own instincts. Where else could she look now that Buzzy was dead? If only Leo had listened to her pleas; if only he'd left her that one source of affection and comfort.

She still felt that cold, hard lump in her heart, nor had anything taken away the dull, persistent headache that had lingered in her brain like an echo resounding from that single shot in the woods. She shut her eyes but sleep eluded her, and when she opened them the sun seemed not to have changed the shadow shapes on the cream-colored walls.



She got up and went downstairs, where she found Myrtle giving the kitchen a final inspection.

"That about does it, love. No excuse for me to stick around any longer. I do hate to go off and leave you though. You will be all right, won't you?"

"Perfectly, Myrtle. Thank you for being such a dear."

They embraced and shed a few tears, and Elnora walked the older woman to her little car.

"You'll send me cards now, won't you, love? From all them faraway places?"

"Indeed I shall. And you must write to me from California."

"Tell the truth, love, I do sort of dread it, pullin' up stakes. You know, I never expected his honor to be so generous. It quite took me by surprise."

Elnora changed her mind about keeping silent. "My dear, you have me to thank for that. I wanted you to stay on—maybe even move out here while we were gone. But Leo wouldn't hear of it. I said it must be either that or he must make you a generous going-away gift."

Myrtle hugged her. "Oh, you are a dear. I never could fathom *his* doing it. Always had the idea the Judge didn't quite approve of you and me being so cozy-like."

They kissed once more and Elnora watched her drive away. Then she walked along the gravel path that circled the shed, averting her eyes from the half-open door. Oh, Buzzy, Buzzy, she thought. To think it would all end like this. And now Myrtle gone too. Never to see either of you again. It's unbearable.

The very atmosphere of the house seemed already changed, as if an air of lovelessness had invaded it that nothing would ever be able to expel. She found herself moving across the lawn toward the hulking figure of the gravedigger, as if in spite of herself she felt the need to draw near to any creature, no matter how unprepossessing.

Luther stepped up out of the hole, which now seemed even more absurdly spacious. Elnora's nostrils were assailed by a mingled smell of raw earth and rank human sweat.

"She gone?" he said.

"Myrtle? Yes, more's the pity."

An impudent smirk settled on his face. "We're all alone then."

The brutish dull gleam in his animal eyes made her wonder if he might be mildly defective in some way, and if she ought to be afraid of him.

But the fear wasn't sharp enough to penetrate the dense layer of despair that clouded her heart.

"Are you nearly finished?"

"Yeah, you might say that." He continued to regard her with a smug, measuring appraisal, and her sense of uneasiness deepened into a more acute awareness of just how alone and defenseless she was.

"Good. My husband won't be pleased to come home and find it's taken you so long. Especially if he's paying you by the hour."

"He ain't. The Judge, he always pays by the job."

"Still, I think you'd better get on with it before he comes home."

"He ain't comin' home. Not yet. Not till late this evenin'. He told me so."

Had Leo really told him that? And did he intend to linger all afternoon? Deciding she needed a drink, Elnora turned abruptly and marched across the lawn to the house. In the hall mirror she caught a glimpse of her face—the skin drawn too tightly across high, fine cheekbones, which seemed almost visible through the transparent pallor of illness and strain. She poked a moist lock of hair away from her eyes, despising the tremor in her fingers. No cause to be afraid, she told herself. Luther was no more than an object on which to focus her more elusive fears—something real and immediate to distract her mind from its dismal preoccupation with the future.

I tried, she thought. I tried to be a good wife. It wasn't my fault I didn't measure up to Leo's expectations. We can't all be poised and confident and efficient like Faye Jimerson. Is it wrong to prefer music to politics? To like art better than football? Why should I feel guilty? she wondered. And was it so unreasonable to ask that Buzzy be spared? Leo had no *right* to kill him.

She poured herself a stiff drink, carried it up to her bedroom, and gazed down from the window at Luther Jimerson. He was shoveling out the last spadefuls of dirt and then unknottng the bandanna from around his head and swabbing the greasy sweat off his husky chest and face and neck.

An animal, she thought. Compared with such a man, Buzzy had been a creature of intellect and feeling. As if her gaze had drawn his attention, he turned and stared up at her window and she drew back behind the drapery, still observing him with the fearful fascination of watching a wild animal at the zoo.

He still held the red bandanna, coiling it now in his hairy mitts, tugging at the ends as if testing its strength. Elnora decided that he must indeed be simple-minded. Presently he moved off across the grass toward the shed, then hesitated, turned, and approached the house instead, all the while twisting that scarlet cord of a bandanna in his hands. Elnora pressed her face to the glass as he vanished from sight beneath the window awnings. She felt below her ribs faint hammer blows of panic. Oh, don't be such a fool, she chided herself. Leo had hired him. The oaf wouldn't presume to do anything outrageous. Yet could one ever predict what such a brute might risk? An animal, with animal lusts. Elnora drained her glass and shakily poured another drink.

And then it occurred to her he might simply be heading for the spigot below the kitchen window, to wash up, perhaps, or to get a drink of water. She waited for the sound of water being turned on, but when nothing happened the hammering within her quickened. What a fool she was not to have locked the door, and it was on her lips to cry out: "Buzzy! Buzzy!" Only there was no Buzzy. There was no one to help her if she needed help. She glanced toward the bedside phone. How long would it take the police to arrive if she called them?

She moved to the door, paused, then crept to the top of the stairs. There was still time to lock the door. Moving with nervous haste, she was halfway down the stairs when he appeared below her in the hall. She froze, her hand tightly gripping the rail. He stood gaping up at her, his bare chest and thick-featured face flushed from his labors, his hands working upon the coiled bandanna.

"Finished?" she called sharply.

"Not quite."

"Then what do you want?"

"Now don't get excited, lady."

He began climbing the stairs, and as she retreated upward her legs felt as weak as reeds.

"Stop! Don't you come up here!"

She could smell him, that rank bestial odor, and she saw the crumbs of dirt stuck to his chest and arms, a smudge of it across his low forehead.

"My husband will hear of this. You wouldn't dare—"

"The Judge? You think the Judge hired me just to dig that hole?"

"What? What do you mean?" She thought of the phone in her room. If she moved fast she could reach the door in time and lock it.

"It's you, lady. You an' the Judge—you're both goin' away, only you ain't goin' to the same place. Judge is goin' off with my sister Faye. They got it all arranged."

"No! No! You're lying!" And she cried piercingly: "Buzzy! Buzzy!"

Luther giggled. "The mutt's dead, lady. He can't hear you."

It was true. It all made sense now: why he'd been so concerned to know when Myrtle was leaving, why he'd kept looking at his watch, the size of the grave, the bandanna. Nor did she any longer attribute to her imagination the element of wrongness that had pervaded her relationship with Leo. He *had* despised her—even hated her.

She turned and stumbled wildly toward her bedroom door, seized the knob, and flung herself inside, then cried out with pain as Luther pushed the door savagely against her wrist. He stood there, enormous and ape-shouldered in the pale, apricot-colored light of the bedroom.

She cringed against the bedpost. "You can't! You wouldn't!"

"For ten grand? Ain't nothin' I wouldn't do for that kinda bread."

"He *paid* you . . . to do this to me. . . ."

He shuffled toward her, the bandanna taut between his fists. She felt the liquor turning sour in her stomach, the taste of sickness on her tongue.

"Not yet he ain't. Not till he knows the job's done."

She arched her throat and a thin, high, whining protest rose to her lips.

"Don't make this no harder'n it has to be, lady."

As the damp cord touched her neck she cried out, "Leo won't pay you for killing me. Please. Don't do it. I'll pay you—"

Her hands flew up to ward him off and a compulsive cry of laughter broke from her throat, until the cord's pressure turned it into a dying, liquid gurgle.

When it was done, he left her and went back downstairs. He crossed to the shed. The box stood there, its lid nailed down as the Judge had promised. Luther didn't like dogs, even dead ones. He looked around for the tarpaulin the Judge had suggested might be used to enshroud his wife's body.

Yes, there it was, in the far corner of the shed. Luther moved to snatch it up and then fell back with a cry of surprised terror. For an instant he thought the dog was alive. Its jaws hung open, exposing the teeth in a frozen grin. The glassy eyes were wide open.

Baffled, Luther stood for a moment glumly looking from the tarpaulin to the box—and then he found a crowbar and pried loose the lid. Somehow, its contents caused him less of a shock than had the sight of the dog.

He remembered the woman's words: Leo won't pay you. And the laugh, the horrible, dying laugh.

He stared down into the box. Unlike the dog, the Judge was not smiling, even in death. His face wore a look of ghastly, startled disbelief.



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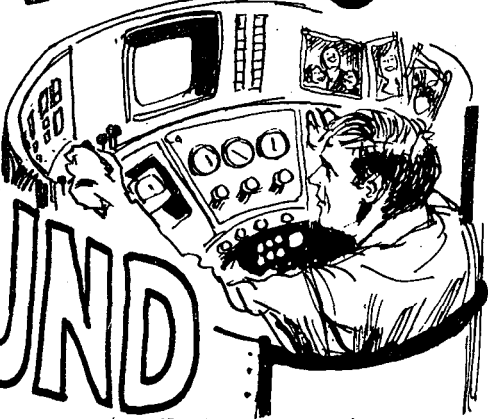
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AHMM A280

*Killing his grandfather hadn't solved anything . . .*

# RUNNING AROUND



by  
**BARRY N. MALZBERG**

The illustration shows a man with a mustache, wearing a suit, sitting in a futuristic control room. He is looking at a large circular panel filled with various dials, gauges, and switches. Above the panel, there are several small rectangular screens or windows, some of which show faces. The man's hands are on a control console. The overall style is a detailed black and white line drawing.

I travel back in time seventy years to the bucolic and gentle year of 1903, where I meet my grandfather as a young man and kill him with a .32-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver. By so doing, of course, I assume that I have settled the difficulties of the instant situation, but when I return in my self-invented, secret time machine—I work in a laboratory in the cellar and refuse to patent any of my devices since I believe that modern corporations are irretrievably corrupt and will steal anything—I find my

wife in her accustomed position in the living room, her arms folded, a bitter expression on her face.

"Now, we won't have any of that," she says, referring to my travels in time, with which, of course, she is familiar. (I would not have her misconstruing my jaunts as adulterous quests or expeditions to the bar, and thus keep her abreast of my findings.) "There are the same bills to pay, the oilman is knocking down the door, the credit bureau has called three times this afternoon, and I'm tired of lying and this has got to come to an end. Edgar, you must face your responsibilities."

Edgar. My name is Edgar. My wife's name, on the other hand, is Betty, and in a moment of passion some years ago I dragged myself, to my infinite regret, from my laboratory to court and marry her. We have two children, Richard and Helen, fraternal twins, eight years old. This was a dreadful mistake. Not the children, I mean—children are inevitable in any marriage. The marriage itself was a dreadful mistake. Inventing a time-travel machine had been my hobby, and I should have left it at that. But the flesh is as infinitely destructive as it is cunning.

"Well?" my wife Betty says to me. "What do you intend to do about this now?"

"Fix it up right," I say and return to the machine, which is a delicate cubicle, man-sized—or woman-sized, rather—about five-feet six-inches in height, three feet all around, just suitable for traveling if I wedge myself within. I turn the dials to 1933 and hastily go back in time.

"Fix it up right," I repeat to the bland inner surfaces of the machine. I have tried to furnish it in a somewhat homelike way with pictures of my family and two covers ripped from old pulp magazines, but it is difficult to dress up any cubicle five-feet six-inches in height and three feet all around. I ignore the pictures and instead absorb the sensations of traveling back in time, one year to three seconds, forty years, one hundred and twenty seconds or two minutes, that is to say. Travel in time is essentially uneventful; I think of it as being something like making love to my wife, Betty—an impenetrable surge of moments during which very little seems to happen until there is an eviction—but do not wish to be cruel to her. "I've got to solve this situation," I add.

What I have had in mind, of course, is to eliminate myself painlessly. Bills, obligations, job troubles (I have a very mundane civil service position, but there has been reordering in the department and I am on the verge of losing my probationary status), marital woes, the general depres-

sion and fatigue of being a citizen of the twentieth century have overwhelmed me, and what I want to do is to end it all in a way so final that it will have never happened at all. Killing one's grandfather is the classic means of doing this, according to the science fiction stories I have read, but it does not seem to have worked; therefore, I will have to kill my father, instead. Surely if I get rid of the old man—for whom I have always had a distant affection; I wish to emphasize that there is nothing personal in this and that parricide or grandparricide gives me no emotional satisfaction whatsoever—in 1933, four years before he met my mother; let alone married her, I will cancel out the fact of myself, to say nothing of my wife, Betty (she would have met and married someone else) and my twin daughter and son. Likewise the creditors and the ugly leakage that has begun to appear in the basement as the result of my experiments.

The dial comes to rest on 1933 with a *click!* and hastily I power down, reset the controls and in a somewhat molelike way emerge from my cubicle, giving the pulp-magazine covers and portraits of my family in repose a last affectionate glance. I am at Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street forty years ago in what appears to be the late-afternoon rush hour, throngs of people passing me busily reading news of the bank closing, marvelous antique buses pouring fumes into the air and past my nostrils. No one appears to notice a blinking thirty-two-year-old man who has just emerged from a five-foot six-inch cubicle, which cubicle instantly dwindles to the size of an apple and is picked up by this man to be inserted in his inner jacket pocket. As I recall, my father, before his marriage, lived with a friend in apartment 3-B at 149 West Eighty-seventh Street, and hastily I set out in that direction. It is convenient that the machine has dropped me so close to the destination; calibration for space in what I like to call (pardon my vanity) Edgar's Device is still inexact and I could as well have been at the intersection of Broadway and Wall, watching some rich panic on the stock exchange. Time is my specialty, it seems; I am loose and sloppy on the space issue, but the fact that I have been able to calibrate so exactly gives me a little surge of feeling; surely this is a good omen and proves that I am on the right track. Now, all that I will have to do is to hope that my father is in, kill him promptly, and let events take their course.

I go into 149 West Eighty-seventh Street unnoticed by passersby and two police who are inspecting a fire hydrant gone mad from the economic disorder of 1933 to hurl torrents of rusty water down the pastoral aspect



of Eighty-seventh Street of forty years ago, find my father's name listed in the vestibule, and, pushing open the door—building access was easy in these times; the crime wave did not get really bad until after the war—sprint up the two flights to 3-B, knock on the door once, and then, unbidden, walk in.

I find my father, much younger than I ever knew him, of course, standing in his undershirt by the window, looking out at the street and the accident of the fire hydrant. He turns toward me, his eyes blinking and full of light, and raises a hand in greeting. A merry man. I never knew him this way. He must have been quite a merry man, however, before he met my mother.

"Hello," he says, "how are you? I don't believe I know you, but that's perfectly all right. Maybe you're the man with the salt?"

He must be referring to some obscure forty-year-old grocery errand, but then again *salt* may have a peculiar local significance that escapes me. "No," I say in any event, "I'm not the man with the salt."

"Ah," he says, "that's a pity." He turns back toward the window. "If they don't seal that hydrant soon, New York's going to be underwater," he says, "and then I won't have to go to work tonight. Which, come to think of it, is all right with me."

As I recall, my father was a used-car salesman at this period of his life; a virginal used-car salesman, as a matter of fact, and according to testimony . . . but then again, and as Thomas Wolfe once said, who can know his father's face? And this is not my concern at the present time. The time to have established a relationship with my father was in 1947 or thereabouts, certainly not in 1933, eight years before I was born or, properly speaking, even in seed form. "You're never going to work again," I say and, reaching into my suit pocket (not the pocket with the dwindled time machine; the *other* pocket, the one with the .32-caliber Smith & Wesson), take out the pistol. "I'm going to kill you," I say to him matter-of-factly.

"That's ridiculous," he says, not turning from the window. "No one's going to kill me. This is 1933, it's modern times, and people just don't shoot strangers in their own apartments. People don't come off the street and kill strangers for no reason."

"You're not a stranger," I say. I feel a little pity for the old man, now so young and confused in his undershirt; it would have been nice if we had established some kind of relationship, I think, but, then again, we

were never able to talk to one another (which is one of the reasons why I became neurotic and wound up in a mundane civil service job, piddling around with time-travel as a hobby instead of making a lot of money for myself), and this is no time to start. "I'm your son," I say nevertheless. "I've got to kill you."

"My son?" he says, turning, hands on hips. "I have no son, and besides, if I did he'd be a wee infant, not a big guy like yourself, about thirty-nine years of age, I'd say."

"I'm not thirty-nine," I say angrily, the gun shaking. Always, always the old man was able to get my goat. "I'm thirty-two and I'm unhappily married and work in a mundane civil service job with bills way over my head and I've decided to end it all by getting rid of you. It's all your fault."

His eyes widen, or perhaps in my excitement I think that they are widening when they are merely deepening. "You must be crazy," he says.

"I'm not crazy. I come from 1973, forty years from now. I was born in 1941, four years after you were married to a girl you won't even *meet* for four years, and frankly, you were a lousy parent, but I don't even want to get *into* that area now. All I know is that if I kill you now you'll never meet the girl or get married and have me, and that means I never will have been born to be in this lousy mess. It's not your fault," I say, leveling the gun. "I mean, there's nothing personal in this. Even if you had been a *good* father I'd still want to kill you. But we were never able to have a good relationship. Every time I tried to talk we got into these silly arguments about my shoes not being shined or why didn't I make something of myself in school, and I just can't get into all that stuff again. I'm sorry," I say and, concentrating hard, start to pull the trigger. It is really a very difficult and embarrassing thing, I have just discovered, to commit parricide. Grandparricide is easily possible—for one thing, I had never *met* my grandfather, who was dead years before I was born—but the father-son relationship is profound with, as they say, many Freudian overtones.

Thus, I am still concentrating on the effort of pulling the trigger and battling a deep sense of remorse when behind me there is a bang on the door and the two patrolmen whom I saw on the street enter the apartment purposefully. Skillfully they surround me, skillfully I am disarmed, skillfully I am manacled and placed in their custody. There is not even any

time to reach for the apple-sized object in my left jacket pocket, much less to try and explain the situation to anyone. Before I quite know what has happened I am very much in the hands of the Depression police and being led gently enough down the stairs. "Don't worry about this one," one of the police calls upstairs to my astonished father, "we had reports that something like this might be going on in the neighborhood. You'll have to come down and give testimony later, maybe, but there's no reason for you to worry about anything like this." From two flights above, my father looks down at me open-mouthed and with some interest, but there is really very little that I could say to him—now more than ever we would have difficulty relating—and so I allow myself to pass from the building and into the street, where the Depression Era police walk me down to the corner, toward the precinct. It seems that, in these times of apple-selling and bank holidays, New York's finest do not have cars at their disposal, although then again they may be specially detailed foot patrolmen. The hydrant, I notice, is no longer gushing. It must all have been a blind to make their presence on the prospective murder scene natural and acceptable and I realize then that all along I have been outsmarted and that probably they were waiting for me.

"You must have had advance knowledge," I say, being half-lofted in their strong arms, my little feet scuttling delicately on the grey but pleasant pavement of old New York. "Someone must have told you that I was coming." Cunningly I try to reach an arm inside my jacket to get the time machine, but they are far more cunning than I; the hand is slapped away, another hand inserts itself and deftly removes the machine. The patrolman to my right looks at it with a delighted expression. "And there's the evidence," he says. "We've got him cold."

"You'll pay every bill you owe, buddy," the other policeman advises. "You'll work hard and you'll meet your debts and be responsible to your family. If there's one thing I can't stand," he says with a trace of disgust, "it's seeing a man trying to avoid his responsibilities."

"How did you know?" I ask pointlessly as we whisk toward a stoplight. "Who told you?"

"We got a tip."

"I know you got a tip," I say rather desperately, "but around here who would know? Who could possibly *know*?"

"Never mind," the policeman holding the little machine says, "we have our methods. And we have our sources of information. Anyway, I think

that you'd know this informant very well. She certainly knows *you*, friend, and is she mad!"

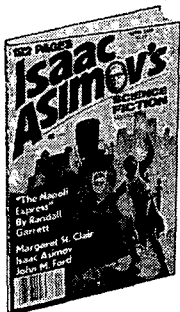
"She?"

"Her name is Betty," the patrolman on my left says amiably enough, "and if I were you, which fortunately I am not, I'd *never* want to go home again, which unfortunately you will have to, because we have too many mouths already to feed in 1933 and, whatever you think, it's better up the line."

"Betty," I say, "Betty." The conniving, rotten woman. And then a certain sense of absurdity overcomes me, or maybe it is a flash of the divine, and I look beyond the flat, high buildings of old New York to the sky of the Depression looming over us, and I laugh.

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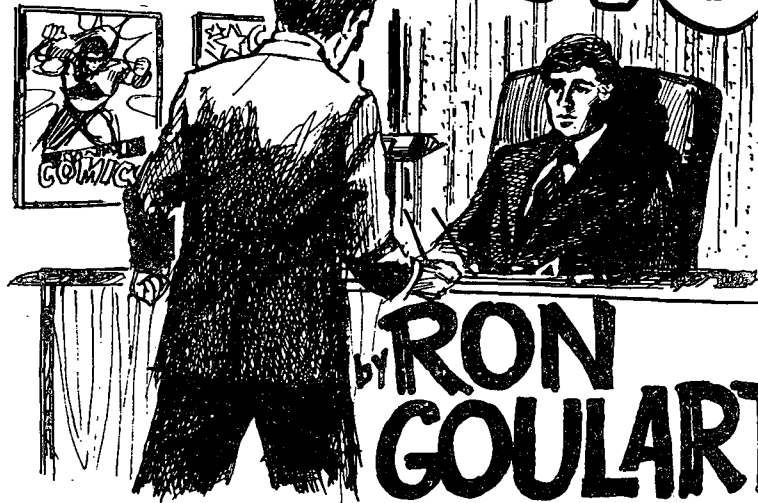
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HQM472

*Hyperman was the largest-selling comic-book character in America . . .*

# BIG BANG



The rain was smacking hard against the big view window of the Inkwell Restaurant, the Saugatuck River was murky and bubbly, and Ty Banner was sharing his fan mail with us.

" 'And since we've named our newest born Ty Banner Sankowitz, we would be both thrilled and honored with a signed original by our best loved cartoonist. A Sunday page would be especially heartwarming.' " Banner smiled and set the letter aside to pick up his second martini.

BIG BANG

83

"While I don't often get touched emotionally by my fans, I have to admit I—"

"Jeeze, don't tell me you got taken in by the Sankowitz clan?" asked Heinz, chuckling.

Banner's handsome though slightly puffy face was touched with a look of surprised pain. "What do you mean taken in? They named the damn kid after me, didn't they? The least I could do is—"

"Did you already send 'em the damn original?" Hollis asked as he tapped ashes off his thin black cigar.

"Sure, on the way over here to lunch." Banner gave us all a perplexed squint. "Do you guys know something I—"

"The Sankowitzes are conpersons," explained Heinz. "They get originals, autographs, photos from all sorts of celebrities. They unload the junk at flea markets, making most of their living that way. They named their twins after me."

"Twins?" Banner scowled into his drink.

"Me too," said Hollis. "And I think they talked Jerry Marcus out of two Sunday pages by convincing him he was their blind grandmother's favorite cartoonist."

Banner said, "Let me get this straight. They didn't really name the kid after me?"

"The only offspring they have is a burly lout of thirty-six," Heinz told him. "Being always so far ahead on *Seaweed Sam*, I had enough extra time to check them out with the postal authorities last year."

"Then there really isn't any Ty Banner Sankowitz? Why the hell didn't you guys tell me?"

"You only mentioned it just now," I pointed out.

"Everybody but me knows about these people? I do *Dr. Judge's Family*, a sophisticated strip that's supposed to keep up with what's going on in the world—" he took a forlorn sip of his drink "—and here I don't even know who the most famous sharpers in America are."

"Fans are almost all out to rip you off anyway," said Zarley. "I never give away an original any more. I figure they'll all end up in art galleries or comics conventions."

"No, some fans can be a help," said Hollis. "They give me a lot of tips on what's going over."

Tuckerman spoke for the first time—he's a comic-book artist and the rest of us are newspaper and slick-magazine cartoonists, so he doesn't

usually take as active a part in our weekly lunch discussions. "Fans played an important part in the Les Marlow business," he said now. "In what happened with Les and Nat Googins, they were very much a factor."

Banner was gazing out our window, watching the heavy rain. "Aw, fellas, not another gloomy yarn about death and trouble."

"I'd like to hear about it," said Zarley. "Do you know what led up to what happened last week?"

Tuckerman nodded his curly head. "Nat and I were pretty close."

"The comic-book world is full of violent people," observed Heinz. "You have to be to draw all that stuff, present company excepted."

"Hey, we don't want sociological insights," said Zarley, nudging Heinz. "We want to know what went on."

Tuckerman nodded in Banner's direction. "Well, it is sort of gruesome."

"Go ahead, tell us," invited Banner. "I can't afford to go on being out of touch with what's going on."

"That big three-page spread in *Fame* a few weeks ago," began Tuckerman, "is what really started things. Up until then Nat Googins had been quietly seething but not intending ever to take any action. On the other hand, when you've been seething for nearly ten long years, a lot of steam can build up. That damn article really pushed Nat into taking action that—"

"I only read *Fame* when I'm at the dentist," interrupted Banner. "What was in this article which apparently everybody but me saw?"

"A profile of Les Marlow," explained Heinz. "Telling how graciously and lavishly he was living, now he was president of Maximus Comics Corporation, mostly off the profits from *Hyperman*."

"Hyperman?" Banner put down his glass. "What the hell is that?"

Hollis sighed. "They're going to put you in a glass case at the Cartoon Museum if you don't shape up, buddy. You really *are* out of touch."

"He's the largest selling comic-book character in America right now," said Tuckerman. "At a time when lots of comic magazines, including the ones Nat worked on, are dropping in sales, *Hyperman Comics* is still selling over a million copies per issue. The revenue from the merchandising—toys, games, books, and the upcoming TV show—will hit about \$14,000,000 this year. Quite a hunk of that goes to Les. He's been running the company since old Max retired two years ago."

"So where does Nat Googins fit in?" inquired Banner.

"He created Hyperman."

"Ah," said Banner.

Nat was slaving away in the Maximus bullpen ten years ago (continued Tuckerman) when he suddenly hit on this idea for an entirely new and different superhero. You wouldn't maybe think there was any chance of coming up with such a thing, but Nat did it. He roughed out a few sample pages, did a finish of a possible cover, and took the stuff in to Les Marlow. Les was only managing editor then, doing a lot of the scripting. He loved the whole Hyperman concept, old Maximus thought it might be worth a try, and so they went with it.

Well, within six months the new magazine was selling 500,000 copies a month. They tried a second title, wherein Hyperman battled famous villains and aliens from other Maximus titles. That was selling 750,000 by the third issue. Kids couldn't get enough of the character.

The way the Maximus books were laid out, mostly due to Les's vanity, each and every story in each and every one had a banner over it saying, "Another Sensational Les Marlow Creation!" Nat didn't mind that, since it was the way Maximus always operated. He got to sign the feature at the bottom of the splash page, and he was getting the top page-rate in the shop. Nat was fast, so he was able to pencil and ink every single Hyperman story for the first two years.

He and Les began to grow in fame and popularity. You know how enthusiastic fans can get about their favorites. They really got excited about Hyperman, especially at high schools and colleges. Pretty soon Les was speaking at universities all around the New York area, explaining how they'd come up with the basic concept, how it fit into Western mythological thought, and so on. The kids loved it, and so did lots of their professors. At first they'd invited Nat to come along too, but he'd always been fearful of large groups and any kind of public speaking and he told Les to go alone, fill in for the both of them.

Well, Les was a very outgoing guy—he loved talking to college kids and ladies' clubs, and going on talk shows. After a while he was getting invitations from all over the country and he realized he had to have a more exciting yarn to spin as to how they'd come up with Hyperman. He concocted one, having to do with a storm-tossed night on Long Island and himself, unable to sleep, musing about the one thing all superheroes up to that moment lacked. He decided to call his old pal Nat Googins. The two of them, getting more and more enthusiastic and excited, talked



on the phone most of the night. The next day *Hyperman* was born.

After a few more months of campus lectures and talk-show interviews, Les eased Nat out of the story altogether. This was mostly because Nat had quit Maximus to go over to their chief rival, All American Enterprises. They'd offered him a fantastic page-rate plus ten percent of the net profits on anything he created for them. At Maximus it was strictly artist-for-hire stuff. Nat didn't own even one percent of *Hyperman*. That was bothering him more and more, so when the All American offer came he took it. The things he came up with for his new bosses weren't bad, but even his best shot—Thyroidgirl—never did anything like *Hyperman*.

He stuck with All American, eventually earning about \$75,000 a year. He and his wife bought a modest house in Chill Harbor, Long Island, and his life seemed relatively settled. But every time he heard about some new triumph for *Hyperman*, he got a little bit angrier. That anger built for several years—then he saw the *Fame* piece.

As a matter of fact, he saw it in his dentist's office. He was having a hell of a time with an abscessed tooth and finally his wife persuaded him to leave the drawing board. Since he went over to All American, he'd been able to work at home.

He's sitting there, listening to the whir of the drill and the dentist's patter from the next room, leafing through *People*, *Time*, and *Flying*. When he picks up *Fame*, there is this incredibly fit and handsome tanned man grinning—leering almost—at him from the cover, all in color. It's Les Marlow.

Les had that knack of thriving on success. Some people, the richer and more famous they get, the more wild-eyed and bloated they grow. Not Les—he kept getting handsomer and more tan. His teeth improved, his hair got thicker and curlier. His wife turned fifteen years younger and became a platinum blonde. Actually, that was a new wife—a sensational young model named Tiffany Lane. Nat's wife is nice, but dumpy now and forty-nine.

So Nat is sitting there, the birds are twittering outside in the dentist's trees, the sun is making stripes across the thick carpet. He's reading about how Les has moved into a \$1,500,000 mansion on the Sound, a real *Gatsby* sort of place complete with tennis courts and an indoor pool. He's got this gorgeous wife and, somehow, his kids from his first marriage have turned golden. His teenage daughter looks like a fledgling Hemingway granddaughter. His son, who goes to Yale, looks like a cross

between a young Robert Redford and a couple Van Pattens. *Fame* shows them all grinning around the house and grounds—six acres—frolicking with tennis rackets, video tape recorders, horses, and a couple of foreign cars of the type Nat's seen only in pictures in his swipe file.

The copy tells how good Les's life is, how money is raining down on him in a continuous shower. Not only does he own this mansion, which he paid cash for, but he has another secret hideaway somewhere else on Long Island Sound—a beachfront studio rumored to be worth over \$500,000. Les goes to this secluded place every day to be alone and think up new and brilliant ideas for Maximus Comics. Even *Fame* claims they can't find out where the hideout is. Les won't tell because he doesn't want the fans to find out. His celebrity is such now that hundreds of fans are always trying to get a look at him, to beg for an autograph, screaming for just a chance to touch him. He tells the interviewer, smiling modestly, that he's starting to feel like some kind of rock superstar.

"'But I never feel guilty about my wealth and prestige,' admits this handsome comics tycoon, tapping his greying-just-a-trace temple. 'I did it all with my own little brain cells. If I hadn't dreamed up Hyperman a few years back, I'd still be schlepping away like some hack, living in a \$60,000 dump in some godforsaken suburb like Chill Harbor.' He smiles that famous boyish smile and you share his enjoyment over the fact that he was bright enough to think up Hyperman all by himself."

"Like hell he did!" Nat stands and throws the magazine at the wall, and nearly knocks down the framed color photo of the dentist's Cessna. "That does it! He's not going to get away with this one day longer, that son of a bitch!"

"Mr. Googins, please—it really won't hurt that much. You won't even be aware—"

"Huh?"

The nurse, plump and striving to be cheerful, is rising from behind her desk. "Maybe you ought—"

"Cancel my appointment," Nat tells her when he remembers where he is. "I just remembered I have an urgent meeting in Manhattan."

When Nat went storming up to the Maximus offices, he was at first

only after recognition. All he meant to do was tell Les to be damn sure he mentioned him in all future writeups. It was bad enough being cheated out of millions, they weren't going to rob him of the credit for creating one of the most successful comic-book characters of all time..

Les didn't make him wait. He even came out to shake Nat's hand in his vast reception room. "It's been too long," he said, grinning. "Haven't seen you since that comics convention in Buffalo last year. All those swarming fans dragged me off before I—"

"I want to talk to you."

"Sure, Nat, come on in. Barbi—no calls for a few minutes."

The stunning red-haired receptionist pouted. "But, Mr. Marlow, United Artists is supposed to call you about the movie and—"

"Tell them to wait. Friends always come before business." Putting an arm around Nat's shoulders, he ushered him into the biggest office Nat had ever seen. It was twice the size of anything at All American and bigger than Nat's entire living room at Chill Harbor.

Right then was when he changed his mind. "I want a piece," he said, moving free of the other man's grip.

"Piece of what?" Les strolled behind his huge metal desk.

"You know damn well. Don't stand there grinning at me with those phony teeth and—"

"Capped, Nat. Still mine underneath."

"You pretend I never existed." Nat stalked closer, making all the fists he could. "You live like a flapping prince, play tennis, ride ponies. I want my share."

The smile went away. "You're not alluding to Hyperman?"

"What else? Natalie the Nurse? Bozo the Robot?" Nat thumped his chest. "I created Hyperman. Me!"

"Funny, Nat, I don't remember it that way at all. The way I recall, it was a stormy night out on Long Island—"

"Fanzine garbage."

"Listen, old buddy, you were just an artist for hire, an employee. I gave you a chance to work on the most sensational idea of the century. You've parlayed that into a pretty soft deal for yourself with our chief competitor, so don't come complaining to me, O.K.?"

Nat stomped closer, raising a fist. "You know, know inside your guts, that all the money rolling in off Hyperman is because of me. I want some, and I'm going to get it."

"You're not going to get penny one. Don't take my word, Nat, see an attorney." Les's smile was coming back. "You did all your work for us as an office employee, so anything you did come up with while you were here belongs to Maximus anyhow. You don't own a piece of zip, buddy."

"I'm not talking about law, I'm talking about what's right," said Nat. "I've been quiet about what you did to me for years, but when I saw you taking a dip in your indoor pool, that—"

"I'm expecting an important call." Les stood up. "If they dump you over at All American, which I hear is a possibility, you're always welcome to come back. I can guarantee you ten dollars more a page than they're giving you."

Nat didn't hit him, didn't threaten him. He marched out of that immense office and went straight to a lawyer.

He went to three attorneys altogether, each more expensive than the last. They all agreed he'd been had and there was nothing he could do about it. Perhaps if he were in dire poverty and ill, suggested the last lawyer, the public clamor might persuade Maximus to give him some kind of token allowance.

"Stuff an allowance," suggested Nat.

It was the next day, as far as I can figure out, that he decided to kill Les Marlow. His basic thinking was, if he couldn't get any of that Hyperman dough, neither would Les.

During the war—that's the Korean War—Nat was a demolition expert. Working out successful explosions gave him almost as much satisfaction as drawing. He was going to arrange an explosion for Les. One to blow him sky high and cut him off from any further fame and fortune, while looking to all the world like a tragic accident.

He took to watching Les's mansion, mostly in the evenings. He was also good at that sort of thing, but even for him it was tough. Some nights there were huge gaggles of kids around the high stone walls of the mansion—as many as fifty or sixty, mostly teenage and college age, pudgy boys and fat girls with skin trouble. All of them were bubbling with Maximus mania, filled with Hyperman hysteria—true believers all, waiting for a glimpse of Les on his home ground, a chance to holler out their affection for him and his creation.

"Creation—bull!" Nat was hunkered down in some shrubbery across the road, watching the whole scene with binoculars. "All those simps

ught to be trampling on my lawn! Hyperman is mine!"

He soon realized he wasn't going to be able to sneak into this mansion to rig up an accidental bang-up for Les. There were several servants, plus a pair of burly goons who were there just to keep the fans at bay. Sometimes the school kids hung around past midnight.

When do they do their homework? Nat wondered. When do they drink beer and fool around?

Obviously he'd have to strike somewhere else. Someplace where there were no hangers-on, no husky employees, someplace where Les would be alone.

Nat lowered his binoculars. "That damn studio. Sure, that luxurious hideaway of his."

The trouble was, he had no idea where the place was. Obviously Les had an unlisted phone there, and he wasn't going to have the address in any directory. It had to be in this part of Long Island, though, fairly near to the mansion most likely.

Having worked with Les fairly closely, he knew he was an early riser, a guy who maintained his brain functioned best in the morning hours.

Nat also knew, from some unobtrusive detective work, that Les was never in Maximus' New York offices much before one in the afternoon. It seemed logical to conclude he spent his mornings in the hideaway. Dropping his night watching, Nat switched to the hours near dawn.

There were even a few fans loitering around the mansion in the thin light of morning. Fat, pimply kids in scruffy coats, clutching bundles of comics encased in protective plastic bags.

Imagine wrapping a funny book up like a baloney sandwich, reflected Nat as he sat in his car up on a side street where he could look down on the mansion and the surrounding neighborhood.

Finally, at a few minutes after six on a slightly misty Tuesday morning the rear gates of the estate whipped open and a grey Mercedes came whizzing out into the awakening day. Nat saw a clunky old VW try to follow it, but the Mercedes accelerated and zigzagged through the empty streets, quickly losing the carload of fans.

Nat, from his high vantage point and by using his binoculars, didn't even have to move. He saw exactly where the Mercedes went after Les lost his pursuing admirers. Only eight blocks away—to a glass-and-wood place sitting on a bluff over the grey waters of the Sound. A lot of shrubbery and a high slat fence masked the hideaway's front.

Les, alone, hurried out of the carport and into the hideaway house. "O.K., O.K.," murmured Nat, using the same tone his dentist use when he was finished drilling and was about to commence filling in the cavity.

Les was out of the hideout studio never later than noon. He drove himself to a forlorn little station of the wretched Long Island Rail Road and went into Manhattan by train.

There were no servants at the studio and the alarm system was fairly simple. Nat outwitted it in less than half an hour on his second scouting trip there.

The house was big and impressive. Beamed ceilings, rich wood-paneled walls, plush carpeting, a mammoth fireplace in the huge main studio. Les even had a framed drawing of Hyperman hanging over his desk—the one Nat had done all those years ago to present his idea.

"O.K., O.K." He moved deeper into the house.

There was an oil-burning furnace in the basement. Nat spent an hour studying it, making notes and sketches in that jerky, impatient style of his. Hell, it would be a snap to rig an explosion and make it look like the furnace had malfunctioned. Things like that happened now and then. The way Nat would do the job, there'd be no snags and no traces.

Les would be blown to dust and Nat could go back to his drawing chores. The envy that had been gnawing at him so long would vanish. He'd have a total remission.

He picked a Friday morning. Parking his car a safe distance from the secluded studio, Nat moved slyly and swiftly through the still-dark morning. He carried a worn black suitcase filled with his tools and ingredients.

Outfoxing the alarm system again, he let himself into the empty house and headed for the basement. He considered briefly taking the framed Hyperman drawing, then decided the hell with it. Let the bastard take it to glory with him.

The work went well. There were no difficulties. He had everything ready and waiting a good five minutes before he heard Les come into the house upstairs. Nat thought at first Les wasn't alone, which gave him a cold prickly feeling across the chest. There were sounds of talking, but no—he was certain there was only one set of footfalls. Maybe Les liked to talk to himself, bragging about how brilliant he was.

Nat didn't want to leave any pieces of clockwork behind, even though the police might never suspect the blast wasn't an accident. He was too careful to risk it, so he was depending on a simple chemical reaction to trigger his explosion.

When he was certain Les had seated himself at his desk, he activated the process that would, in a little over twenty minutes, cause just about all of the studio to go flying.

Packing his gear, but leaving his gloves on and clutching a length of lead pipe, he started upwards.

Les was indeed alone, hunched over the desk with his back to the approaching Nat. Crossing the room silently, Nat knocked him out with two rapid swipes of the pipe—another knack he'd acquired in the service. This way there was no chance Les would leave the house too soon.

There'd been considerable temptation to make a little speech, to tell Les exactly what was going to happen and why, but Nat realized that was grandstanding as well as risky. The house would blow in seventeen minutes or less. He had to get out and away.

With one last glance at Hyperman, he trotted out of the big studio.

As he reached for the knob of the back door he became aware of murmuring outside. He dashed to the kitchen window and carefully peered out into the back acre.

Fans!

A hundred—no, closer to a hundred and fifty. Standing on the dewy grass, trampling the flower beds. Just standing there, pudgy blotchy faces aimed at the house, little piggy eyes gleaming as though they'd found a shrine or a treasure they'd long been seeking.

Fifteen minutes to go and no way to reverse the process and halt the explosion—no safe and sure way.

Get the hell out of here, he advised himself.

O.K., he'd have to brazen it out, face these pinheads.

There was actually cheering when he stepped outside.

"Wow, it's Nat Googins!"

"I told you this was the right place!"

"This is Les Marlow's hideout!"

"I told you I'd found it!"

Nat, lugging the suitcase, tried to walk unobtrusively along the flagstone path which led around to the front of the house.

They didn't let him.

"Mr. Googins, sir, is Les inside?" asked one of the teenagers closing in on him.

"He is, but he's awfully busy." By pushing and elbowing he made a little progress—a few yards.

"We've been hunting for this studio for months."

"Are you and Mr. Marlow going to be working together again?"

"Is the feud over?"

"I'll let Les break the news," Nat said. One of them bumped into the suitcase with a fat knee, rattling the tools.

They were coming at him like cockroaches across a sink top, skittering from every side to converge on the spot where he stood.

"Do you like Thyroidgirl as much as Hyperman?"

"Who does your inking?"

"Kids, I have to be in New York early today." Nat tried a fatherly smile. "So if you'll let me—"

"Autograph?" A pudgy hand was thrusting a hunk of brown paper and a ballpoint pen at him.

"I really, gang, don't have time to—"

"Just one, please!"

"Autograph, please, sir?"

"Will you sign this, please, Mr. Googins?"

They were handing him comic books, notebooks, tablets, envelopes, scraps of paper.

Eight minutes at most.

"O.K., but not here." He gathered in a handful of paper and writing implements. "Let's get out to the street."

After a few seconds of shoving, with his suitcase held up against his chest, Nat got them to give way. They allowed him to inch his way out to the sidewalk and across the street to his car, a safe distance from the house.

If he could get away and ditch the tools before things started exploding he might still have a chance.

"Will you autograph this comic book, please?"

"Can you sign my cast, Mr. Googins?"

"This one's for my cousin—he's in the hospital."

"You're the best in the business, Mr. Googins."

"Yeah? Thanks." Nat scrawled his name fast, but new cards and slips of paper kept circling him.



"Could you draw something in my sketch book? I've already got Gil Kane and Frank Thorne and—"

"I'd like to, but—" He noticed the kid who made the request was in a wheelchair. "O.K., kid, let's have the book."

"Hey, he's drawing sketches!"

"Can you do me Hyperman, Mr. Googins?"

"Just a profile, please."

"Could you draw something right here next to Les Marlow's signature?"

"Listen, I really—"

"My brother's in the hospital too—can you draw him a picture of Hyperman in bed?"

"Here, on this card."

"Watch it! I was next!"

"You're really doing great work these days, Mr. Googins."

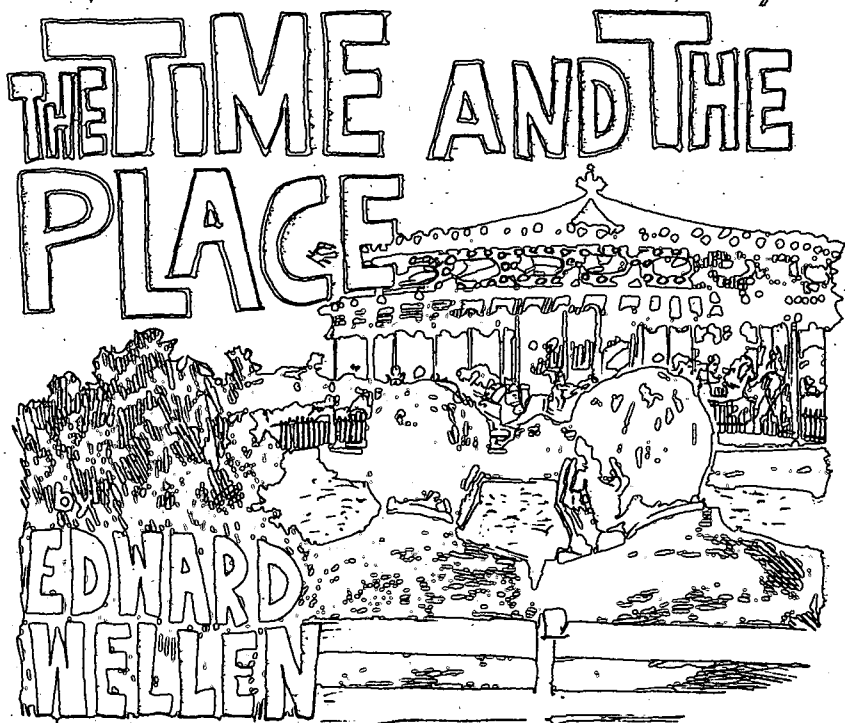
"Think so? Well, I try my best."

"Just one more, please."

Well, what could he do? He was still signing away when the house blew up.



*The assassination would set the world aflame . . .*



The spy and the intelligence courier sat side by side on the bench in Vienna's Prater, but traded password and countersign without glancing at one another. They fixed their eyes on the carousel and smiled at the merriment and spoke low. The spy breathed no easier on reassuring himself of his contact.

"Aboard the Orient Express they would have got me if I hadn't pulled the cord and jumped. I landed in a field of maize and hid by day, hiked

by night. But I don't flatter myself I've quite given them the slip. So look out for yourself when we part."

The contact's smile twitched briefly into a grimace. "Thanks."

"Sorry. But I had to keep this meeting to pass along what I picked up in the Balkans. There's going to be an assassination that will set the world aflame. It will take place on June twenty-eighth in the town of—"

The waltzing calliope covered the sound of the shot, so that the courier didn't at first know it was a bullet that collapsed the spy. The spy seemed to have suffered some sort of seizure that urged him off the bench to the ground. Then realization flashed and the courier flung himself to the wall.

But the killer had hit his target and fled. Gingerly, the courier rose to kneel beside the spy. The spy made to speak but only pumped bright blood. The bullet had torn his windpipe. Staring as though hanging on, by his eyeballs, he plowed the soil at the foot of a shrub with his index finger, beckoning letters out of the ground:

## C A P A

His despairing intentness said he had more to say, but the ghost sighed out of him before he could finish the word.

The courier and the spymaster met in the security of headquarters, in the holy of holies of the Chief's office, but the courier sat on the edge of his chair and looked over his shoulder at every passing tread in the corridor.

There was no small talk. The Chief's way of putting him at ease was to get down to business, to focus energy on the matter at hand, to think aloud.

"You say he said he picked it up in the Balkans. That doesn't mean he meant it will happen in the Balkans. This CAPA-abortion could be anywhere in the world."

"True, Chief."

"So we'll just have to cover every eventuality."

"True, Chief."

"June twenty-eighth. At least we have three weeks to do it in."

"True, Chief."

The Chief eyed the courier. The courier had served his function as sounding board and the Chief dismissed him.

The Chief turned his office into a war room. A world map covered one wall. A phalanx of colored pins stood ready. A voluminous gazetteer lay to hand.

Drawing a breath as though opening sealed orders, the Chief lifted the cover and turned to the C's. He let out his breath. Not as bad as he had feared. He ran his gaze down a mere baker's dozen of place names.

On the other hand, the place names spanned the globe:

Capa, Puerto Rico  
Cápa, South Dakota, U.S.A.  
Capac, Michigan, U.S.A.  
Capakçur, Turkey  
Cap-à-l'Aigle, Canada  
Capalonga, Philippines  
Capanema, Brazil  
Capanne, Italy  
Capannori, Italy  
Capão Bonito, Brazil  
Caparica, Portugal  
Capasin, Canada  
Capatárida, Venezuela

It would spread the Firm thin to cover all these places with equal attention. He would have to deploy his manpower judiciously, committing the most to the likeliest. He stuck thirteen pins in the wall map, then summoned his area deputies.

"Take a good look and pick out the towns you're responsible for. I want everything you have on each of these towns that even wildly suggests it's where an assassination attempt will come off on June twenty-eighth—and I want it now."

The area deputies looked the map over well and then looked uneasy. They had never heard of any of these places. True, they knew the Chief's "now" to be hyperbole, yet they also knew that the sooner they came up with something the better they would stand in the Chief's eyes.

The Italian deskier was first to spot a connection. Her fine Italian finger pointed to the pin marking Capanne.

"The Pope. He's an avid amateur archaeologist. This summer he plans to visit the ruins of Laurentum. He'll have to pass through Capanne."

A chill coursed the Chief's spine, producing a paradoxical glow. A papal assassination could well throw the world into chaos. But as it came the glow faded. He knew it was too good to be true that they had struck paydirt with the first stroke of the pickax. And indeed the other deskers were fast finding color in their pans all over the map.

A British royal personage had a hunting and fishing lodge near Cap-à-l'Aigle, Quebec. "Now, if a French-speaking separatist were to kill the Duke . . ."

Capa, South Dakota, was within bowshot of the Rosebud Indian Reservation. "It's a campaign year in the United States. The President will stump the West in aid of his party's congressional candidates. The Great White Father never misses a chance to pose with the Indians, wearing a feathered war bonnet. It's as good a place as any to pick him off."

That was all they could come up with at the moment, but it gave the Chief the beginnings of deployment.

As the deadline neared, other more or less likely targets popped up.

A charismatic West Pointer with a man-on-horseback future led troops putting down an armed uprising on Luzon in the Philippines; Capalonga lay in the hotbed area of Luzon.

An oil tycoon would be visiting his holdings in Venezuela; hard by, Capatárída graced the Gulf of Venezuela.

The Belgian royal yacht cruised Portuguese waters and planned to put in at Lisbon; Caparica stood across the Tagus from Lisbon.

The scion of North America's wealthiest family ran a cattle ranch in the Brazilian state of Pará; his local mistress lived in Capanema, Pará.

An exiled Spanish pretender had an estate in Tuscany on the outskirts of Capannori.

And so it went, down to the rumored presence in Çapakçur, Turkey, of a Kurdish rebel raising a guerrilla force.

An assassination in any of these CAPA-places might, by one of history's quirks, light Armageddon's fuse.

One last meeting—part pep talk, part finishing touch. The Chief's encompassing glance swept the table.

"As far as I can see, we've thought of everything. Unless one of you sees something the rest of us are overlooking?" He sent his gaze clockwise, then counterclockwise. "No? All right then, we're now in position to

forestall any attempt on anyone in any way CAPA-connected. Before we break up, there's just this. Don't let down your guard. Don't let down your side." He nodded dismissal.

The South American deskier gave the briefest knock on the holy of holies' door before bursting in.

"Here's one CAPA-place we overlooked, Chief. Capachica. It's on the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca. I just now heard that a Peruvian professor of archaeology is in charge of an expedition that's heading there to salvage the gold of the Incas from the lake—gold sacrificed to the gods and secreted from the conquistadors. Peru shares the lake with Bolivia, and Bolivia's in a mood to do something about the taking of the treasure."

The Chief quickly recovered his color. He stuck another pin in the wall map, hard, while scanning the map to see where to reassign agents from.

He hurried to the communications room and then stood watching while chattering code dispatched a scratch team to Capachica.

To think how close they had come to overlooking Capachica, not foreseeing that the target could be not a world-famous name but a nonentity like the Peruvian professor on a delicate mission!

He let out a curiously unsatisfying sigh of relief. On a conscious level he now felt certain he had left no loopholes. On an unconscious level he had the uneasy feeling of having overlooked the obvious.

The Chief lay dreaming. Maybe because he felt like Atlas bearing the world's weight on his shoulders, a vision came to him of a spinning globe. The globe slowed to a stop, showing itself to be a maliciously grinning face. The grin split the face in two. The face tilted till the grin stood vertical. The Chief sat up, sweating.

He had nearly overlooked the International Date Line.

Depending on whether you stood east or west of the line, your June 28th could be another's June 27th or June 29th.

He would have to copper his bets—treat the run of three days as June 28th.

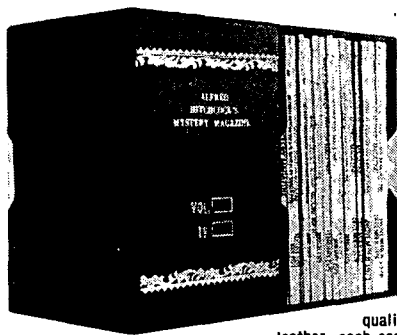
Reaching out decisively, he picked up the phone and barked at the duty officer to spread the word.

He fell back, smiling. *Now* he had covered every possibility. *Now* he had fulfilled his responsibility. *Now* he had exercised a general's prudence and capacity. *Now* he could sleep.

June 28th, European time, passed without world-shaking incident in Capa, Puerto Rico, Capa, South Dakota, Capac, Çapakçur, Cap-à-l'Aigle, Capalonga, Capanema, Capanne, Capannori, Capão Bonito, Caparica, Capasin, Capatárida, or Capachica.

On June 28th, 1914, a young Serb shot and killed Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife Sophie at Sarajevo, Bosnia.

Sarajevo. Capajebo in the Cyrillic alphabet.



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*Chick Kelly wasn't sure about going into the disco business . . .*



I've never seen a sadder look than the hangdog gloom on Zack Davis's mahogany mug when he told me he and the combo were quitting the club I run on Third Avenue.

"I feel like a punk, Chick, but what can I do? The single is shipping platinum and the A&R and the record-company brass have laid it heavy on me, man—tour or get off the bus. We've been together a lot of years, Chick, and I know I owe you, but—"



"You don't owe me bupkis, Zack. Sure, I hate to see you go, but you've got a gorilla hit on your hands. It's sunshine time, pal, so don't be a wimp. Smile."

If they're organizing a committee someplace to search for the world's most unselfish man, Zack gets a landslide nomination from me. Owe *me*, he says. I owe him ten years of loyalty as my accompanist (often unpaid) when I was doing stand-up on the road. This big brown bear and I have played everything from mud-and-truck shows to top rooms and all the goon joints in between. His time had finally come, and he's feeling guilty about it. Move over, Gandhi; look to your laurels, Dr. Schweitzer; the Zack is outdoing your trip.

It took me half an hour to reassure him and shoo him off to the land where Grammys grow. But though I was delighted for the guy, Barry Kantrowitz—my former agent and present partner—was sucking on an invisible lemon after Papa Bear left us alone in the back office.

"The least you could have done was toss him a mazel tov, Barry."

"I live and let live, Chick. I like Zack—I wish him the mother lode—but that doesn't help *our* situation. Since his 'Blue Friday' hit the charts, we've been doing fantastic business, drawing a younger crowd—spenders. Now what? We'd go for our lungs hiring a *name* talent."

I didn't bother to remind him that I considered Chick Kelly the joint's *name* talent, because my bald, paunchy partner was right—Zack's success had become our success. So much for ego.

"I'll shop around Local 802 and see who's in the market," I said, knowing full well I wasn't going to find anything beyond musicians who gigged weddings and bar mitzvahs.

"You know what our problem is, Champ? We've got no definition—no image."

A side note here for the uninitiated, folks. The last speaker is Jack McCarthy, my kitchen manager, who's never in the kitchen managing. Instead, he invites himself into my life as my alter ego. Take the "Champ" bit. This little banty thinks I'm the ace of aces. The thing of it is, it's not sycophancy, it's genuine, embarrassing adoration. He's like the pet monkey in the old calypso song—he dresses like me, drinks the same drinks, and, if I'm dating a redhead, he goes out and gets one. If it's a blonde, he's right on the dime with one of his own. Clones can be irritating, but you're stuck with them.

"Jack Mac," I said to him, "every time you come up with a suggestion  
GO DISCO 'TEC, CHICK!

it brings me grief. Let's not forget that it was your idea about the wine cellar, and we ended up with a corpse on our hands."

Did you ever look a dog in the eye just after you've kicked it? Agony—pure agony. The big brown eyes say, "Why did you do that cruel thing, boss?"

"All right, Jack Mac, that was a cheap shot. What's with the no image?"

"You got to keep up with the times, Champ! Customers want upbeat involvement. Does Macy's have a bargain basement? No, it's 'The Cellar.'"

"And no corpses." I couldn't resist it; I'm a louse at times. It didn't take any zest out of his pitch, however.

"Does Bloomies have a housewares department? Hell no, it's 'The Main Course'—chrome, lights, boffo—"

"Jack Mac, I'm in the bistro business, not the department-store trade."

"We *should* be in the disco business, Champ, and that's a fact—a money-making fact. It's what the public wants, Chick."

"Look, Mr. Ziegfeld, as I recall it was you who also dreamed up the toplless-waitress bit while I was filling in for Buddy out in Vegas. You recall the mess that got me into?"

"Bad breaks. We were ahead of our time."

"Nuts. Open up this place to the disco crowd and we'll have dopers and stoners zonking all over the joint. And all they do is dance—they don't drink; they bring their own high with them."

"Champ, I don't mean open the entire facility. We just use the lower dining level from ten P.M. on for all your society friends—like a private-club operation."

"No. End of discussion."

"Chick darling—" Barry is heard from "—maybe the boy has an idea there. After ten we don't do much food business anyway."

I knew it! Believe me, I could smell it in the wind when Jack Mac went into his act. They were all in on it: Barry; Guido LaSalle, my head chef; Cuz D'Amico, my lead barman; Ling, the maitre d'; the undercooks, busboys, waiters, and, six-to-one, even Mitzi, who runs the hat-check room when she's sober. If past experience was any guide, each and every one of them would have a rational reason why we should go into the jiggle-and-jump business, and how my stubbornness is leading them into poverty.

I'm being set up, friends—and it's all my own fault. In a moment of

madness I gave everybody a percentage of the profits, thinking it was a genius way to insure hard work and honesty. It did, but I never figured on a legal mutiny. I took command and slapped the desk for emphasis. "No! Like the man said, include me out. Period."

When Discochick opened two weeks later, the lower dining level looked like a neon-sign makers' convention. The only point I had won with the staff was my refusal to wear a white three-piece suit. Along with this electronic nightmare, I also inherited Lyle DuChamps. To me, he's a disc jockey—to himself, he's an electronic musicologist. He gets \$250.00 a night to change and spin tapes over the audio system.

"You must understand, Mr. Kelly," he says with a superior tone of voice that would make Queen Victoria sound almost chummy, "disco programming is an art form. I must build the mood throughout the evening. Not just anyone can do it."

"Swell, Lyle—mood it up."

And he was doing it to a fare-thee-well on opening night.

"Why is Beauty-boy so pouty?" Tish Loman says to me at the bar in the front lounge. "The Disco is marvelous—so very in-in."

"Who's pouty? The thing's a success, isn't it, thanks to you and your friends. I'm happy, see?" I gave her a forced smile.

"And you were so lucky to get Lyle—he's the best. Actually, I discovered him, you know. Used him at a private bash in Tahoe last season—the one you didn't show up for. Lyle is *our* DJ, and now we don't have to go all the way to the West Side."

If you think she's being a snob, you're absolutely right. Moneyed New Yorkers become collectors before they're out of rompers. It's jade with Bobo This, and Buffy That specializes in antique silver. Tish is into Oriental art, and on and on—seashells, cut-glass figurines, stamps, music boxes, eighteenth-century clocks, show horses, disc jockeys, and, of course, their very own comic (guess who?). That's what Tish means by in-in. My whole act is in-in: Bryn Mawr reunion gags, stock-market one-liners, Palm Beach and Bermuda schtick—even a six-minute routine about Bunny, the debutante who studied interior design at Parsons and has a business in Bucks County, where she turns well appointed houses into barns. You're saying that's not funny, but your grandpa didn't own coal mines or oil wells, pal. Scott Fitzgerald was right about the rich being different, and I just tapped the market—kind of a macho Noel GO DISCO 'TEC, CHICK!

Coward. The court jester is the only one who can poke fun at the king because even royalty needs a good ribbing. Hell, why should the blacks, Jews, Irish, and other ethnic groups have all the fun of laughing at themselves?

"Oh, thank you, Cuz," Tish says when she's served a Skylab (one sip and you're falling through space). It's been in-in since the summer. She was looking over my shoulder at the front door and suddenly her face went into a smarmy smirk. "Talk about nerve! Or is she still on your string, lover?"

I turned around and saw her for the first time in six months. She looked just as blonde and luscious as the night she stormed out of my pad. Now, however; Jeepers Jordan had a fresh tan, a \$30,000 diamond wedding ring on her finger, and her husband, Robert Fremont, on her arm.

Tish was positively purring. "Too bad you're not wearing a white dinner jacket and Zack isn't back at the piano, darling. You do such a wonderful Bogart imitation."

"Can it, Tish," I said, getting up from the stool and walking toward the checkroom. Ling must have spotted her before I did, and we almost collided midway across the lounge. "I'll face it myself, Ling."

"Chick, maybe you shouldn't."

"Ling, I said I'd cover it. Relax."

I went up the five steps to the checkroom level and, as I approached them, I could actually pick up her scent. She may have married a multimillionaire twice her age who could well afford to have a special scent developed for her, but the old Ralph Lauren perfume still clung to her—and me.

"Good evening," I said, extending my hand to Fremont. He was not the short, fat, bald stereotype that marries young showgirls. He was tall, fairly trim for a guy in his sixties, and his tan went very nicely with his thick white hair. He looked like he should be conducting a symphony orchestra somewhere.

But he wasn't. He was in my club, with my Honeybear, shaking my hand with cold reserve.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Kelly, isn't it? I believe you know my wife, Johanna."

She took my hand and gave it a ladylike shake, her touch instantly doing something to me that is usually the province of fourteen-year-old boys.

"Good evening, folks." Ling comes up with the rescue. "Dinner or dancing?"

"Dancing, Ling," Jeepers says. "Can you get us a table close to the floor?" She looked at me. Damn cornflower-blue eyes on tanned blondes anyway. "You haven't stopped doing the act, have you?"

"Only at two, just to keep things moving."

Fremont looked a little grim. "I don't think we'll be staying that late, dear."

"This way, folks," Ling said, and I followed her with my eyes as she went down the steps in that awkward heel-first, then ball-of-the-foot way she has of walking. I once bought her a pair of swimming flippers as a gag, to prove the point.

"Charles Xavier Kelly, old chum, let's tie one on." It was Tish standing beside me, being matey. "In fact, let's get stinking and maybe fly to Vegas. We'll drop a bundle and then go on down to Poco and get an over-all tan . . ."

"Sorry—no trip, Tish. I ended up married that way once."

"Now that's a spiffy idea," she says, taking the gold compact from her purse. "Some for baby?"

"You're going to burn a hole through your nose with that stuff, Tish. And what the hell are you bringing it in here for anyway?"

She caressed my cheek gently. "Chick, you are one of the few people I know I never want to see hurt. Irish minstrel mine, I'd kill for you if you'd let me."

"Well, I wouldn't let you." I noticed that Mitzi was enjoying the show from the checkroom counter, so I took Tish by the arm and led her back to the bar. A free show Mitzi didn't need—at least not without popcorn.

If I stick with vodka and tonic no lime it's virtually impossible for me to get smashed, but my chemistry (or emotions) must have been on the blink, because I was getting fuzzy around one o'clock. Even Tish was getting slurry since she switched to the razor-blade soup (straight up with a twist). But I wasn't drinking enough to miss the commotion down on the disco level. I saw Ling hurrying for the phone. "What happened? Fight? Drunk?"

"Looks like a heart attack, Chick. A guest is giving him mouth-to-mouth, but the guy has turned blue already."

He was dialing 911, and I was cold sober now, moving for the back office where we keep the oxygen bottle. One of the busboys had the same  
GO DISCO 'TEC, CHICK!

idea and I grabbed the mask and tank from him and started down to the disco level, when Toby, the men's-room attendant, came up to me. "Mr. Chick, I got a sick drunk in the john—"

"Give him a bromo," I said, dashing on. "I've got a guy dying down there."

And dying he was. Sprawled on the floor with a man pumping on his chest was Robert Fremont, definitely turning blue. His wife stood in shock, turning pale under her tan.

"Has someone called 911?" the man administering aid said, taking the oxygen bottle and putting the mask over Fremont's mouth.

"Yes," I told him. He had to be a doctor; he knew what he was doing.

He confirmed it. "I'm a doctor. Is there anyone here who carries nitroglycerine tablets?"

Suddenly a guy in a white paramedic suit pushed his way through the crowd. "Jeez, another one! What's going on?"

"I'm Dr. John Parker," said the man working on Fremont. "What do you mean, another one?" He took the black bag out of the paramedic's hand.

"Direct adrenalin," the ambulance guy said, kneeling down to unbutton Fremont's shirt while Parker filled a syringe. "We came in and a men's-room attendant said someone was sick in there. We never figured on two cardiacs in the same place at the same time. My partner had started to work on him when the headwaiter told us to come down here. It's unbelievable."

I guess it was, because by five o'clock that morning, the City of New York was involved. They came in several shifts, with Lt. Donald Jaffee in the vanguard at 1:30 A.M. Bullethead is with Homicide, and I could see that he was spinning great theories inside his shiny dome. He's a real Albert Einstein when it comes to Chick Kelly—he wants to make me relative to every crime in creation. We were alone in the back office where I was explaining the law of gravity to him. Mitzi had taken Jeepers to lie down in the ladies' lounge.

"So you see, Lieutenant, the former attraction between Mrs. Fremont and me no longer exists because the inversely proportional distance between us is—"

"Cut the clowning, Kelly. A very important man is now on his way to the morgue after coming in here with your ex-girl friend."

"He died from a coronary—this Dr. Parker said so."

"But he won't sign a death certificate, will he? He said it 'appeared to be a heart attack.' He's no forensic scientist."

"So? You have a few on the payroll. Use them."

"Oh, we are. In fact, an assistant M.E. is working on him right now. I just want to get the details straight. There are too many coincidental elements in this mess. Two guys have 'heart attacks' at the same time in the same place—at adjoining tables, yet. Only one of them makes it, or barely makes it, since he's in a coma. Maybe someone got the drinks mixed up."

"You've got a terrible hangup on the Borgia approach to mayhem, you know?"

"No, I don't, Kelly, but I do know there are poisons nowadays that are almost untraceable."

"I don't have any applications for the CIA on hand, but we do have some openings in the KGB. I'll stake you to the airfare. Come on, Jaffee, you're making a soap opera out of this. O.K., haul me in, but leave the widow alone."

"Very rich widow, I'll wager. Maybe it's even more subtle than a modern poison. Maybe your girl friend knows the old guy has heart disease, gets him in here to dance up a storm to this jungle music, and—"

"Now you're as far off base as you're going to get, Jaffee. There are seven witnesses who told you he didn't dance once since he came in. He sat there with Jee—his wife and drank one glass of Perrier water. You have the glass, the body, and the entire M.E.'s staff, bubby, so get the hell off my back before I start screaming harassment."

That, as I said, was at 1:30. At 3:15, after he worked over Tish and she called to get a Supreme Court judge out of bed who got an Assistant D.A. on the scene, Jaffee was learning to spell harassment backwards and in capital letters.

His name was Rasmusian. Tallish, bespectacled, Brooks Brothers all the way. A criminal prosecutor's title he may have, but he looked very West Side liberal politician to me.

"I think the Lieutenant was being a little premature, Mrs. Loman," he said as she sat like a dowager empress in the Eames chair opposite him. And to rub it in, she's sucking a toke and poor Rasmusian is stoically taking on a secondary high. If the cops tossed her and found that compact, she could be up for twenty or more. I said could, but they wouldn't and

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she won't. The let-'em-eat-cake school of politics and checkbook justice are always with us.

"Quite candidly," he went on, "the chief medical examiner is not totally satisfied. Oh, no need for alarm. Mr. Fremont definitely had heart disease, and there was no apparent trace of toxic substance in the remains. However, there is this element of coincidence, and he would like to extend the forensic examination more fully. I mean, after all, that's his province, not the D.A.'s office."

"What rot, Mr.—"

"Rasmusian, Mrs. Loman."

"Of course, Mr. Rasmusian. You hear of people dying of heart failure every day. My late husband did, and I'm on the Heart Association's Board of Directors."

I didn't follow the logic of that statement, but a freeze was creeping over me. Tish knows as much about drugs as the dean of a college of pharmacology, and she was away from the bar—little girls' room—several times that evening. She even looks like what I would expect Lucrezia Borgia to look like. Slightly small-framed, almost deceptively fragile, with raven hair, incredibly steady dark-brown eyes, and an I-want-what-I-want-when-I-want-it nature.

"I heartily agree with you, ma'am—most emphatically. But we have other coincidences to deal with. Both Mrs. Fremont and Mrs. Clyson are former friends of Mr. Kelly."

"I don't know any Mrs. Clyson," I said.

"Mrs. Virginia Clyson of Las Vegas. She's the wife of the gentleman in the coma. Now you'll have to admit, Mrs. Loman, *that* is a coincidence."

I'm spinning the mental tapes and can't dig up any Virginia Clyson—but I have played Vegas, and you meet a lot of people.

"Furthermore, both women appear to inherit large estates. Clyson owns the Sagebrush Broadcasting Network and, of course, Mr. Fremont was immensely wealthy. So, you see, Lieutenant Jaffee has some reason to be suspicious."

"Of Mr. Kelly?"

"Not necessarily. However, he was involved in a murder case where an elusive drug called succinylcholine was used."

"I wasn't *involved*, Rasmusian. I *solved* it—and Jaffee never forgave me for saving his bacon."



"Yes. I've heard of your penchant for dabbling in police matters, Mr. Kelly. I was merely pointing out prior knowledge. That's an observation, not a charge."

So now I knew why the Assistant D.A. had brought a search warrant with him and why Jaffee and Company were tossing the joint.

Tish got up abruptly, walked to the phone, and dialed. "Libby—Mrs. L., dear. Sorry to get you out of bed—but would you please go into my bedroom and get my phone directory? Yes, I want the private numbers of the mayor and the governor. Thank you." She stood tapping her sandaled foot and tossing Rasmusian that steady, hawklike stare of hers.

He started to say, "Now, Mrs. Loman, I hardly think—" but that's as far as either of them got, because just then Jaffee opened the office door and shoved his flushed face into the room.

"Five controlled-substance busts, Mr. Rasmusian. All employees, of course. The disc jockey is into cocaine."

Now how's this for unadulterated, laid-back cool? Mrs. Tish Loman puts down the phone, takes out her compact, powders her nose, and says, "Rasmusian, you are a double-dealing—" It was not a word that's used in Radcliffe anatomy classes, but it probably is around the dorms.

Cops share something with mental defectives—they both have trouble with numbers. Now you and I would say the Seventeenth Precinct, right? Not so with the N.Y.P.D. They talk prowl-car radio lingo, and call it the one-seven, which, to extend the nonsense, is on Five-one Street between Third Avenue and Lexington.

It is five-oh-oh on the c-l-o-c-k and I'm no longer Chick Kelly—I'm police mug shot six-three-seven-thousand and also a public nuisance, says the blotter on the desk of Sergeant Gold Badge seven-two-six-eleven. In attendance at the one-seven prisoners' pen after I got out of cell one-six was my lawyer, Ted Summers, who is four-three years on earth and Tish, who's on cloud nine-plus with the contents of the compact. The Jeep is in Lenox Hill Hospital under sedation—not from a compact but probably two-five-oh milligrams of legal stuff.

"You know, Mrs. Loman," Ted said as we waited to go downtown, "you really shouldn't be here. The way you worked Rasmusian over it's a wonder he didn't book you too."

"Impossible. Only Scavullo takes my picture, everyone knows that. Besides, Lyle is a friend of mine."

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"He's going to need a friend, believe me. He also needs a lawyer."

"He's got one—you. Name your price, Mr. Summers."

"Doesn't Langston, Phipps and Dranger represent you?"

"They'd be lost in a criminal case. Lyle says he didn't have the substance physically on him. The police found it in the control booth."

"Which is always locked and he has the only key. All right, we'll see when we go downtown for the arraignment. I think I can attack the intent of the search warrant if it goes to trial."

The locked control booth and the single key were among Lyle's demands in deigning to work for me. "I don't want anyone fooling with the mixer and tapes. I even lock myself in during the show. You don't know the disco crowd, Mr. Kelly."

The legal raindance down on Centre Street at 9:15 A.M. is known by many names. To defense lawyers, it's called discovery; to prosecutors, it's hide and seek; to the judge, it's pure boredom. The other four busts fell apart at the stationhouse. The busboys only carry marijuana in violation amounts—they got the equivalent of a traffic ticket.

Ted came out the winner with my charges being dropped and Lyle going out on \$50,000 bail supplied by Tish, who might as well be supplying her supplier for a change. As we left the Courthouse building, Jaffee was standing in the rotunda with a mean look on his face that told me he wasn't going to give up easily.

When Tish's limo dropped Ted and me at the club, Ted was very emphatic about my not going to Lenox Hill to see Jeepers. "No contact whatsoever, Chick."

"Why the hell not, Ted?"

"Because I know Rasmusian—and you should know Jaffee by now. They aren't going to be satisfied with just a coke bust—and I think I can get that tossed out before I'm through. The forensic people still have Fremont's body, so they're looking for something. And if they find it—"

"You don't think Jeepers would poison her husband—and in public, for crying out loud."

He shrugged. "Maybe not, but you stay away from her, Chick. I know you're not going to like this, fella, but you've let the last six months cloud your judgment. Since when was she all sweetness and light? She was a bitch on wheels, and you know it. Temper tantrums, tossing ashtrays—half the people in town believe she married Fremont to spite you. And this Clyson guy having a stroke at the same time only muddled the waters.

How well did you know his wife, anyway?"

"As she told Jaffee, she met me once in Vegas, that's all. I don't know why she even brought it up."

"She probably didn't. Jaffee was looking for a connection and he found it. Stay away from her too."

I didn't have to. Two days later she contacted me via a very sleazy process server. You'd think someone seeking a million bucks in damages would have sent a nattier messenger.

"It's such a nutty claim," Ted said after reading the document, "that it might work. It would certainly confuse a jury to beat hell."

"Never mind the jury—I'm confused. She's suing me for preferential neglect because I took the oxy bottle to Fremont instead of to her husband? Ted, that's not just nutty, it's goddamn silly. There's no law that says I have to keep life-saving equipment on hand. Or hire cardiac specialists as men's-room attendants."

"If this case were prepped by some shyster I'd see it as a scam, but Langston, Phipps and Dranger don't play those games."

"But this charge that I refused Clyson aid is a lie. Wait'll I get my hands on Toby!"

"Take it easy. You had superseding cause—or at least reasonable cause."

"And how does Tish's lawyer get mixed up in this? She's another person I'm going to talk to, believe you me!"

"They handle a lot of communications work, and Clyson owns a broadcasting network. Mrs. Loman's powerful, but not *that* powerful. Mrs. Clyson probably put the screws to them." He stopped for a second and looked over his glasses at me quizzically. "Chick, you didn't—"

"I don't even know what she looks like! If she met me in Vegas, I don't remember her!"

"Then it's not spite."

"Spite?"

"I'm trying to figure out why she brought a suit that she has only a ten to nine chance of winning. If not spite, what? Misplaced retribution, maybe. But the guy didn't die."

"Hey, wait a minute. What about this? Could the guy have had a bad heart, comes in here and boogaloos up a storm, and gives himself a thrombo?"

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"Only it says here he didn't dance—and it's documented by witnesses."

"He didn't dance, Fremont didn't dance—this is some disco I'm running. Maybe Madame Clyson gave hubby a black pill in his drink, huh?"

"Jaffee would have checked that with blood samples. He did have a case of hypertension, but it was compensated."

"What?"

"Controlled. Pills. His company doctor says so. But that's not the issue, Chick. It's this damned statement of yours, 'Give him a bromo,' that bothers me. It's sarcastic. Juries don't like wise guys."

"Well, I sure ain't got a million big ones, buddy."

"Don't worry about it. I'll talk with her lawyers and scout it out."

After he left I had steak and eggs and got more bad news.

"Chick," Ling said, putting down the side order of mayonnaise (the only way to eat steak), "with all the confusion the other night I forgot to tell you about Flip McQuade."

"My nephew? What about him?"

"Well, he's only seventeen, isn't he?"

"Yes. Almost, anyway."

"That's why I tossed him and his date out the other night."

"He was in here? I'll break his neck. Get me a phone, Ling."

Foster Chapin McQuade is my sister Lila's kid, but you can't blame that moniker on her. That's his old man's doing—Ah-thur, as in Ah-dvertising, McQuade. I call the kid Flip and he loves it.

"Hey, Daddio," the smartmouth says when I get him on the phone.

"Don't daddio me, you crumb. What are you trying to do, get my license lifted?"

"Oh, the other night. Well, Uncle Chick, I didn't *drink* anything."

"You're not supposed to be in the joint, period."

"Jeez, what a grouch. I hear you got busted again. My father's ticked. The *shame* of it all."

"Don't be a wise guy. I mean it, Flip. This place is off limits, understand?"

"O.K. by me, Unc. We were leaving anyway. The music stank. You ought to get a new DJ."

"Big expert you are. I pay the guy two and a half yards a night because he *is* an expert."

"Hey, I'll do it for half the price, Unc. The guy plays very funny stuff."

"Go back to your pabulum. And remember what I said."

I no sooner hang up than Barry looms into view looking like he already knows about the lawsuit, though there's no way he could have.

"What's the matter, Barry? You look like yesterday's shredded wheat."

He slumped down next to me on the banquette. "I felt swell until I let Sylvia badger me into going to the doctor. Now I feel terrible."

"That's some doctor."

"Don't rib me, Chick. This is serious. I should never have gone."

"What's the matter?" He should never have gone and I should never have asked. Everything seemed to be wrong—high blood pressure, obesity, trace of blood cholesterol.

"And me a man who watches himself like a hawk. I take my pulse every morning like clockwork. Ninety beats a minute which is O.K. in a man my age. If that Fremont hadn't dropped dead I wouldn't have gone to the doc and I would've been happy. Now it's diets, pills—"

"Stop crabbing. At least you know now and can take steps. We doctors call that compensation. Also, you're overweight—and you can't take your own pulse, dummy. Besides, Fremont didn't die of a heart attack, he died of ignorance. He never went to doctors either—or so Jeepers told Jaffee. Thank your lucky stars, Barry, and take your pills."

"They don't make me feel any better," he said, taking one.

"They'll keep you from feeling very dead."

Remembering I wanted to chew Toby out for cooperating with Mrs. Clyon's lawsuit, I got up and went into the men's room.

"Lo, Mr. Chick," he said sheepishly.

"Thanks, Brutus. They slip you a fin or so for the information?"

"What information? Oh, the plainclothesman asking about what happened that night. I stuck to the guy getting sick, Mr. Chick. I didn't say nothing about the stash I found in here."

"Dope in *here*?"

"Sure. I found it when the ambulance guys were here." He walked over to the towel dispenser, opened the top loading section, and took out a vial containing three yellow pills. "I hid it in here when the cops started searching the place. When the detective came back the next night and asked about the man having the heart attack I was scared he'd frisk the joint. Them 'ludes?"

"They don't look it. That was no city cop, Toby—probably a private dick working on a lawsuit."

"Suit? For what? I didn't do nothing. The man comes in all flushed,  
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says he feels like he's going to throw up, goes over to the sink to wet his face, and keels over. That's when I went for help. I didn't do nothing except hide those pills I found on the floor."

He was very scared and I felt sorry for him. "It's O.K., Toby, you're not involved. But in the future, when a guy comes around asking questions always ask for his badge."

I put the vial in my pocket and went to the back office to contemplate the mess I was in. I'm supposed to be a comic, but right now I'm a real Pagliacci, I can tell you. Lawsuits, Jeepers in a jam, bad publicity. I'm thinking maybe I should go have my heart checked (and, since Jeepers is back, maybe checked for cracks). Of course Ted was right. She's no prize package, but neither am I. Enough philosophy—I've got work to do.

I made a list of all the aspects of the case—every instance, everything said, all the players in a row. I made a few phone calls and one in particular, to Tish Loman.

"Gawd, *no*, darling," she responded, "and I'm not telling you where I do—at least not on the phone. Why do you ask, Beauty?"

"I just wanted to cover a base."

I had to wait for twenty-four hours, then it all fell in place, and I called Jaffee—who first refused, then called back to say that Rasmusian grudgingly agreed to listen.

It was quite a breakfast party I was tossing in the private dining room off the second level that morning at ten. If I had to read the various vibes in the room, I would say Rasmusian and Jaffee were a mixture of curiosity and disdain; Dr. John Parker, the Samaritan who had helped Fremont, was uneasy or indignant, take your pick; Dr. Maurice Lind seemed to be enjoying a morning off from his M.E. chores—as was Professor Paul Emile, whom you'll meet in a minute or so. The only thing missing was a psychiatrist, and I'm sure they all thought I needed one when I told them my theory.

"Preposterous!" Rasmusian said with a courtroom flourish.

Jaffee was playing counterpoint to his tune. "Gentlemen, none of you know this character as well as I do. Flights of fancy are his specialty—but this one takes the cake."

"I don't even know why I'm here," Dr. Parker said. "My first-aid measures were fully covered under the law."

The M.E. was trying to be kind. "Your idea is clinically interesting and maybe not preposterous, but wholly unprovable, I'm afraid."

Professor Emile had a nice big grin on his face. "Mr. Kelly, I think you're a very clever man, and I am not speaking pejoratively."

"Oh, he's clever all right, Professor," Jaffee cuts in, "he's just stirring up a lot of smokescreen because he's up to his ears in a lawsuit."

"Gee, fellas, you're a tough audience. You're shooting me down because I used the word murder. Give a guy a chance, will you?"

"And to prove it in court you need to demonstrate means, opportunity—and a motive wouldn't hurt matters."

"Right you are, Mr. Rasmusian."

"I'll tell you this, Mr. Kelly—" Dr. Parker was getting agitated "—if you try to implicate me you'll be facing another lawsuit, one that will spin your head around. Dr. Lind's autopsy protocol states it clearly. Fremont died of decompensated heart disease—obviously untreated for years. No foreign substances found—"

"Except the adrenalin you used."

"Now, Mr. Kelly—" the medical examiner came to his colleague's defense—"that is wool-gathering. He was dead when the adrenalin was injected. And it *was* adrenalin."

"Never doubted it for a second, Doctor, since the wagon medic supplied it. I only bring it up because the police and the D.A.'s office were in love with a poison theory for a while and let the obvious slip by them."

"That's a bunch of—"

"Lieutenant, why don't we let Mr. Kelly go on? I think I know where he's going."

"Thanks, Professor Emile," I said.

"Wait a minute," Jaffee growled. "What have you two guys cooked up anyway? And just what are you a professor of, Emile?"

"Musicology. More particularly, composition. At Juilliard. I never met Mr. Kelly before this morning. I was asked here by Zachary Davis, the jazz musician."

"What's music got to do with this?" Jaffee had on his confused face. "The man didn't dance."

"Oh, I see." The M.E. sucked in his cheeks, thinking he looked pensive but actually giving the effect of being one of his own customers. "But I'm afraid it's all wet, Mr. Kelly. Forensically, it was considered, but only as a contributing factor—certainly not the cause."

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Rasmusian was half out of his chair. "Will someone kindly tell me what the hell you're all talking about?"

The M.E. went on. "When we were told that Fremont had died in a discothèque but had not performed the strenuous dances of such places, we considered the mere excitement of the atmosphere, the incessant beat of the music, as the triggering factor. It could have been, but that wouldn't make it—let's say—malicious on Mr. Kelly's part, since Mr. Fremont's condition was unknown to or ignored by the victim himself over a number of years. There was also the factor that he had recently married a woman many years his junior."

Dr. Parker in for the M.E. "I guess that's why you're here, Professor Emile. As a music expert, what is the beat of a disco song?"

"The correct term is tempo. It varies from song to song—ninety per minute, a hundred, even up to 123 or so."

Parker looked across the table at the M.E. "Short duration, even at 123? Doubtful, very doubtful. He survived a new marriage, didn't he?"

"Now what does that mean?"

"It means, Mr. Rasmusian . . . no, wait, let me back up. The normal heart beats between sixty-four and ninety a minute, depending on age, health, and other factors. These are tolerable limits. However, in moments of high excitation—making love, say, or in combat—it can climb over a hundred. In sex, it's pleasurable; in danger, it's not. Under short time exposure we usually survive. I don't think you all need a lecture in cardiovascular diagnosis, but Mr. Fremont died naturally."

"Sorry, Doctor—it was murder."

I gave Ling the high sign and he went out on the club floor and signaled to Flip in the control booth. The stereo loudspeakers we had spotted in the room blared, and a wild tempo jarred each and every one of us.

"Good Lord, that comes close to cacophony," Professor Emile said when the song faded.

"What would you say the tempo was, Professor?"

"Well over 130. I'd have to scope it."

"It still won't wash, Mr. Kelly," Parker said, shaking his head. "One would still have to be exposed to that beat over a long period of time before his heart became sympathetic—imitative of the rhythm—sorry, tempo."

"I agree," the M.E. said, shaking his head. "And what I'm going to say is out of my province, since my job is to determine cause of death, not



motive. But you seem to have put yourself in a precarious situation, Mr. Kelly. Possibly Fremont *did* know of his condition and told his wife, who told you. Is he confessing to something, Mr. Rasmusian?"

"Are you, Kelly?"

Suddenly I'm Kelly without the Mister, which is the way the legal mind works when they think they've got you. "No, I'm just trying to lead you out of the land of ignorance, as the old prophet said. Dr. Parker, why did you ask if anyone was carrying nitro pills when Fremont was laid out on the floor?"

"A desperate hope that some cardiac patient was there, I guess. Many of them carry nitro with them."

"Did you look through Fremont's pockets?"

"I didn't; I was busy with the CPR procedure. His wife looked and found none."

"We know that, Kelly," Rasmusian said. "Jaffee had her checked out. There weren't any."

"Check. How about Clyson, the broadcast tycoon?"

"I knew it! *I knew it!*" Jaffee is shouting. "It's a smokescreen for his lawsuit. We're all being massaged. Are you taping this, Kelly?"

"Smokescreen your bureaucratically tangled foot, Lieutenant. But I can't fault you all the way. You didn't investigate an attempted murder."

"What's your game, Kelly? I'm talking officially as an Assistant District Attorney."

"And I'm talking officially as a guy who's been hassled and is getting sick and tired of doing your job. Jaffee horns his way in here because there were two cardiacs at the same time in the same place and then conveniently drops the guy that survived."

"The hell I did. I had a tox scan done, with Dr. Parker's permission, and it was clean."

Rasmusian looked more interested. "You attended Clyson, Dr. Parker?"

"At Mrs. Clyson's request. When I saw that nothing could be done for Fremont I went up to the men's room to see if I could help the paramedics. This place is in the Lenox Hill Hospital ambulance zone and I have privileges there, so Clyson's wife asked me to ride in with him. Mrs. Clyson told me he suffered from essential hypertension. He had a classic stroke—the EKGs showed that. I went along with the tox scan to get Lieutenant Jaffee out of our hair."

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"So if his condition was compensated—to use your lingo—where were his pills?"

"Nitroglycerine pills? Hypertensives wouldn't normally carry them. And he didn't. I phoned his doctor in Las Vegas and he told me that Clyson was on a regimen of two thousand milligrams of Aldomet a day plus a diuretic, that's all. He normally monitors Clyson four times a year, but he's been here in New York for the past six months."

"Not nitro pills, Dr. Parker—his blood-pressure pills. Two thousand milligrams a day sounds like a lot of pills."

"Eight a day at two hundred and fifty milligrams each. He didn't have them with him. Probably forgot them. They wouldn't have stopped a stroke, however—or even caused one if he missed a day or so."

"He didn't forget them, Doctor," I said, taking the vial from my pocket. "He dropped them in the men's room."

Parker took the vial and examined the two yellow tablets. "They look like Aldomets, but they're . . ." He rubbed one in his fingers and handed it across to the M.E., who did the same thing and looked puzzled.

"Will sugar pills do?" I said. "Placebos?"

Jaffee was really screaming now. "That's withholding evidence."

"Evidence of what, Jaffee? Ah, yes, the murder that never happened. Look, fellas, let me give you the full scenario. The doctors admit that constant exposure to a tempo over 120 or so could set up sympathetic vibrations in the heart."

"I said theoretically."

"I'll get to that, Dr. Lind. Now you take someone with a cardiovascular problem, expose him to that cacophony I just played, and meanwhile hokey up his real medication with placebos, and the guy has to be a sitting duck. As I understand it, a person with untreated hypertension doesn't feel ill at all."

"That's why it's so difficult to keep them on their regimen. They feel the same with or without the pills," Dr. Parker said pedantically. "That's why high blood pressure is called the silent killer."

"Only *our* killer wasn't silent, was he? My disc jockey used to work at Lake Tahoe, a stone's throw from Vegas. Suppose Mrs. Clyson and Lyle baby cooked up a scam. She gets Clyson to New York for a long stay away from his doctor and his real medication. She plays hopped-up disco tapes all the time on the premise that she loves it, and Clyson pampers wifey. Now that's attempted murder, which is a felony—and if

someone else is killed in the commission of a felony, it's murder."

Rasmusian leaned back and looked at me for a full two minutes. "It's too cute, Kelly. First—how can you prove that the vial was Clyson's? Second—you could never prove he was exposed to a lot of disco vibrations. Third—if this Lyle character was in cahoots with the wife, how could they be sure the husband would shoot a stroke on that particular night when he played that particular tune? The jury would laugh all the way to a Not Guilty verdict."

"I don't think they knew he'd have a heart attack that particular night, but Fremont dropping dead certainly must have unnerved Clyson—enough to send him to the men's room, feeling ill."

"He's got a point there," Parker said. "The music, the atmosphere, a man dropping dead, could put crucial stress on an essential hypertensive. Maybe not death, but certainly burdensome stress."

"But you still can't prove it, Doctor."

"Yes, you can, Rasmusian," I said. "You already have Lyle on a possible dope charge, and Jaffee here is an expert at leaning on people."

And he did. Wow, he did, and Lyle fell apart like a house of cards.

"Kelly," Bullethead says to me three days after he got Lyle's confession and had Lyle and Mrs. Clyson in the pokey, "I'll give you this one. But I still can't figure out why she drew attention to herself with the lawsuit."

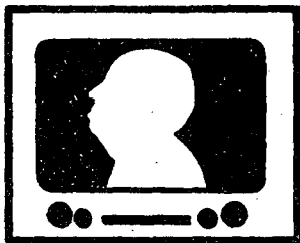
"Because when you people started to nose around and ask questions, she must have felt offense was the best defense. Besides, her husband was still alive, with a good chance of pulling through, according to Dr. Parker. If he recovered, he wouldn't suspect the dutiful wife who tried to avenge him. They didn't expect him to keel over that night, did they?"

"No. Lyle saw them come in and played the hyped-up tapes as a private joke between Virginia and himself. There's really no way we're going to get them for Fremont's death, you know, although we convinced Lyle we could. Cokeheads are stupid. We still might not get a conviction. There's a lot of money behind her."

"Well, Jeepers is off the hook, and that's all that matters to me."

"Yeah. I figured that was your angle. Well, she's got lots of jack now, Kelly, so I guess you'll be on Easy Street."

He just had to get a zap in, the bastard.



# CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

An ex-cop himself, Joseph Wambaugh has detailed the policeman's lot with power and accuracy across several best-sellers, and on the screen as well. The first film, *The New Centurions* (1971), fairly closely adapted from the book which brought him national attention, detailed the awesome pressures a cop faces on the job—although he felt that having superstar George C. Scott, fresh from *Patton*, playing the officer who eventually kills himself distorted the importance of that particular role. He was more satisfied with the adaptation of his *The Blue Knight* (1972), which became television's first attempt at what later came to be known as mini-series, starring William Holden as old-fashioned foot-patrolman Bumper Morgan whose beat is an inner-city neighborhood and who has trouble adjusting to new styles in red tape; the program sired a weekly TV series with George Kennedy in 1975.

Wambaugh was responsible for the creation of the high-acclaimed, extremely realistic anthology series, *Police Story*, which debuted in 1973 and ran weekly for four years. The author thought only twenty percent of the shows were any good at all, but it is the only television series to win two Edgar awards from the Mystery Writers of America. (Interestingly, Angie Dickinson's sexy, stylish *Police Woman* is a spin-off from the show.) He was verbally assured a few years back that director Robert Altman would not significantly alter the screenplay he had done of his own novel, *The Choirboys*, but was horrified at the changes. A lawsuit followed. Wambaugh was determined to have control of his own work in future—especially in the screen adaptation of his *The Onion Field*, the

ccount of an actual crime and its aftermath, which he both wrote and produced. Just released, it is on every level a Wambaugh film: purposeful, avagely realistic, quietly heroic, an examination of defeat and despair. It is a cop film, and one of the best.

It begins quite ordinarily, in the spring of 1963. Two young Los Angeles policemen are cruising the night streets in an unmarked car. They spot another car whose occupants, dressed in leather jackets, are acting suspiciously. But in the next careless moment the officers allow the two in the other car to pull a gun on them, and they are taken to a remote onion field in Bakersfield where, under an onion moon, suddenly and impulsively, the brash, psychotic leader of the two criminals (a chilling performance by young James Wood) shoots one policeman dead. The other manages a harrowing escape into the night. Hours later both criminals are picked up by a highway patrol. And the story proper begins.

What should have been an open-and-shut case becomes the longest trial in California history. What should have been a feeling of relief for the surviving cop evolves instead into a phantom of punishing guilt. John Savage as that young officer etches in deft, sparse strokes the suicidal depression that turns him into a compulsive shoplifter, gets him kicked off the force, and nearly has him (as have several other despairing Wambaugh characters) "eating his gun." All the while the case drones endlessly on through appeals and mistrials; a district attorney rages that "lawyers can deem that fantasy is fact and that lies are real." The young killers thrive in prison, adjusting superbly, and will be released in three years. Their victims learn "there's no gratitude for policemen," and *we* learn, as *The Onion Field* is harvested, just which are the wounds time can heal.

Joseph Wambaugh is already at work on his next project, happily a more cheerful one: a screen treatment of his book, *The Black Marble*. ("Black marbles are the marbles losers always pick," moans a small-time crook in the film.) It is a romantic comedy about the uneasy love affair between a woman detective sergeant and a fellow cop as both pursue a dognapper. Paula Prentiss and Robert Foxworth are the ill-matched pair, and—as we may well expect from Wambaugh—there will be some grim interludes spacing out the humor.

Canadian radio is far more ambitious than its American counterpart. Recently the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation broadcast a ninety-min-

ute tribute to the art of Raymond Chandler which was outstanding in depth and scope. Producer-writer Patrick Hynan transcribed reminiscences from those who knew the writer in London, New York, and Hollywood, structuring an oral history which serves to remind us how much—among his other skills—Chandler enriched crime on screen.

Chandler transformed a despised, low-grade hack form into a literature as original as any. He presented us with a “murky underworld of crooked judges, sadistic cops, swaggering gangsters, impossibly beautiful blondes, enticing brunettes, shady doctors, bootlegging nightclub owners”—and the noble Philip Marlowe. “Get this and get it straight,” barked the Hollywood radio Marlowe, “crime’s a sucker’s road, and those who travel it wind up in the gutter, the prison, or the grave.” For Chandler crime led to the movie capital.

George Harmon Coxe of Flashgun Casey fame recalled that Captain Shaw’s *Black Mask* magazine “wasn’t just read by truckdrivers”—it was studied by studio executives. In 1933, Chandler—age 45—had sold his first story, “Blackmailers Don’t Shoot,” to the magazine for under \$200. His first novel, *The Big Sleep*, was published in 1939. By 1944 he was in Hollywood writing for Paramount.

Billy Wilder, with whom he collaborated on *Double Indemnity*, noted that Chandler had never seen a script in his life; had only gone to movies, and not too many of them. Terminology was, however, unimportant—any secretary could fill in the fade-ins and fade-outs. What made Chandler “pretty close to a genius” was the way he could set up a character in a line or two of dialogue. (Wilder’s favorite line in the film is when Barbara Stanwyck asks Fred MacMurray when they first meet if he likes her name—Phyllis—and he responds: “Let me drive it around the block a couple of times.”) Wilder thought Chandler “nasty”; in turn, Chandler believed working with the director “probably shortened my life.” Each learned a great deal from the other.

Producer William Dozier remembered that Chandler “looked old, shaggy, and tired. He was an unhappy man personally. He drank a lot, but drank well; it never interfered with his work.” John Houseman tells how Chandler was able to finish the script for *The Blue Dahlia* quickly (Paramount was in a terrible hurry for it because star Alan Ladd was due to go into the Army shortly) by going on a two-week bender. He had exacted from the desperate studio these demands: two Cadillacs at the ready to fetch producer or doctor (for glucose injections), six secretaries

in relays of two for dictation, and a direct phone line to Paramount. Amazingly, it was a coherent screenplay and a successful, good movie.

Chandler and Dashiell Hammett met only once, at a Hollywood dinner party, but characteristically had little to say to one another.

Other voices heard on the CBC show belong to English mystery writers Michael Gilbert (for whom Chandler “jumped up from the page and hit you in three paragraphs—and kept hitting you”) and Julian Symons (“a thwarted romantic, a thwarted intellectual, a thwarted man”). For admiring Hollywood writer Gene Levitt, Chandler “looked more like a schoolmaster—[more like] a pipsqueak than a hard guy,” noting that every other writer in Southern California tried to imitate his style. Edgar-winning screenwriter E. Jack Neuman compared him to Dickens and—like Wilder, who to this day credits his own skill at dialogue as in part learned from Chandler—raved over such direct, compressed prose as: “She was as hard to get as a waiter’s eye.”

The most striking portion of the program presented excerpts from a rare BBC interview between James Bond’s Ian Fleming and Chandler. The urbane Fleming heaped unabashed homage upon the hesitant, awkward-sounding American. Among the praise: “Marlowe seems *real* to me. . . . You develop your characters so much more than I do. . . . You’ve done some of the finest dialogue written today.” Chandler was less responsive. A fascinating exchange.

The CBC and Hynan are to be applauded for this extraordinary documentary, and there is hope Public Radio in this country will pick up the show—an exploration of the creation of the quintessential private eye, who in print and on the screen became the stuff of legends. Keep an ear out for it.



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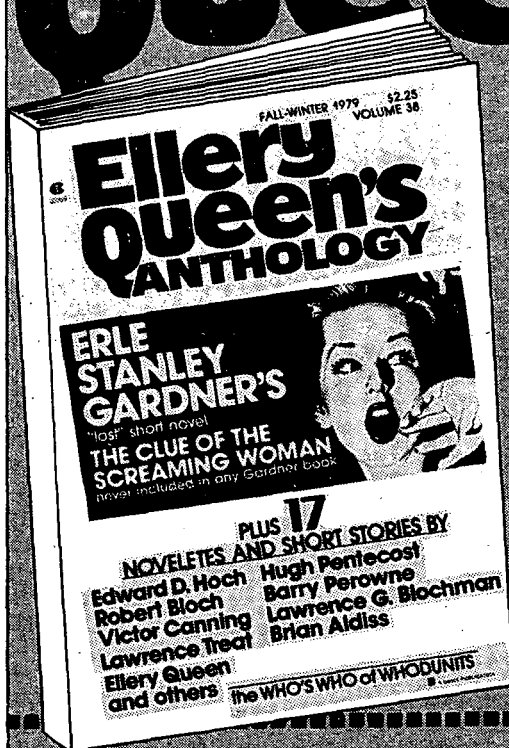
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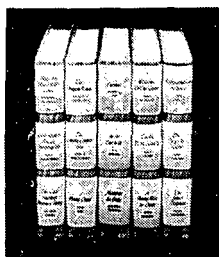
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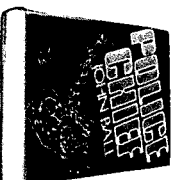
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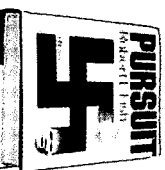
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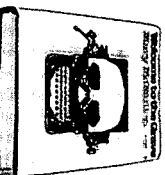
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